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**I AM NOT THE PROBLEM:**

**CHALLENGING DEFICIT NARRATIVES OF INDIGNEOUS**

**DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ALTERNATIVE MEDIA.**

A research project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of International Development

Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this research was to explore the extent to which alternative media sources challenge normative representations of Indigenous peoples and provide an opportunity for alternate representations, specifically expressions of agency and empowerment. Mainstream media oversimplifies Indigenous development goals and relies heavily upon stereotypes and problematising discourses. Critical analysis of alternative news articles show that alternative media represents issues related to Indigenous development from a collective perspective, demonstrating a strong presence of solidarity. Contestation of problematising discourses is commonly situated in a context of colonisation and ongoing marginalisation and through this narrative stories of agency and empowerment are shared. Overwhelmingly, there was evidence that Indigenous development was not being undertaken in a participatory approach, the state failing to consult and instead enforcing paternalistic and punitive policies specifically targeting Indigenous communities. A key finding of this research is that alternative media provides a voice for those silenced by state processes and policies, disseminating urgent calls for community-based engagement and recognition of the ongoing impacts of colonisation for Indigenous development.

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## ACRONYMS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AI	Amnesty International
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CERD	Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
KLC	Kimberley Land Council
LCS	Little Children are Sacred Report
LRNC	Land Rights News- Central Edition
LRNN	Land Rights News-Northern Edition
MIPR	Media and Indigenous Policy Report
NATSILMH	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health
NIDAC	National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee
NIT	National Indigenous Times
NTER	Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act (2007)
PIC Report	Priority Investment Community Report (2010)
RDA	Racial Discrimination Act (1975)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNPFII	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
WA	Western Australia
WNAC	Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1949 President of the United States of America Harry Truman made his inaugural speech, during which he stated that “more than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant” (Truman, January 20 1949<sup>1</sup>). Even today, in both developing and developed countries, similar messages continue to be delivered by political figures via the media with reference to Indigenous people. The impact of labels such as *primitive*, *stagnant*, *misery* and *victim*, for example, are disempowering and can contribute to a sense of a second-class citizenship in which the labelled group needs external support to improve their lives.

In the context of Australia, Hinkson demarcates mainstream media representations of Indigenous people and their position or state of development into two distinct categories: the hunter/gatherer or the impoverished outcast (2010). In doing this she highlights how the media simplistically positions Indigenous peoples as the *other*, either as a primitive group in need of protection and preservation, or a geographically isolated group plagued with poverty and in need of rescuing. Whatever the category applied, the solution is always development from the outside or top-down.

Hinkson’s categorisation of mainstream media is in keeping with research from a vast range of authors<sup>2</sup>. However, there is a space for challenging these representations and development solutions as seen within the growing body of alternative media producers. By using a post-development framework (Escobar, 2012; McGregor, 2009) I aim to contribute to Hinkson’s media categories by analysing alternative media coverage of Indigenous development, in the context of Australia. This is a desk-based study which draws from post-development to analyse alternative media representations of Indigenous development based on the premise that alternative media is one potential means of promoting agency and empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from the American Reference Library - Primary Source Documents, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Altman and Hinkson, 2010; Altman and Russell, 2012; Atkinson, Taylor and Walter, 2010; Dodson, 2007; Fawcett and Hanlon, 2009; Hunter, 2007; Macoun, 2011; McCallum, 2013; Morphy and Morphy, 2008; Morphy and Morphy, 2013; Proudfoot and Habibis, 2013; Sorenson, Fowler, Nash and Bacon, 2014

## 1.1. PERSONAL STATEMENT

I selected this area of research after spending several years in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia. During my time living in Alice Springs and later Darwin, I worked as a Registered Nurse. I was confronted by the health disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous patients, and the sheer complexities of conditions I was presented with. Probably more confronting though, were the conversations I was privy to. The main street of Darwin was a fusion of cultures, a consequence of the unique landscape and history attracting a steady stream of tourists and temporary workers. And yet, conversations held were commonly discriminative and misinformed about the traditional owners of the land they were visiting. Descriptions of local Indigenous<sup>3</sup> people as dole-bludgers, alcoholics, and so on plagued the pubs as the labour force finished their work for the day. My knowledge of the socio-political position of the region I was working in gave me a huge sense of despair when hearing these conversations. An example of this is the vast number of Indigenous people displaced from their traditional communities due to inadequate remote health care services (Brady, Tyler, Foster & Tabart, 2008). For example, a significant homeless population surrounded the Darwin hospital purely to access the dialysis unit each day. Over the course of my time in the NT it was apparent that there was a divide between the socio-political context and the rhetoric of the general public.

Toward the end of my nursing career in the NT I was directed to the field of development studies. My feelings of frustration and futility became something tangible and meaningful as I learned about the impacts of colonisation and post-colonial critiques of with reference to representations of indigenous people and their status of development. I learnt also about the power of language. Many research papers discussed Indigenous Australian development in terms of deficits when compared to Euro-Australian or non-indigenous population groups. Post-development literature helped me to become aware of the impacts of deficit discourses, especially the implied power imbalance between those applying the deficit label and those receiving it (Fforde,

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<sup>3</sup> Indigenous (capitalised) is the collective term for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, two distinct groups within Australia; indigenous (lower case) refers to a broader global context. Aboriginal Australians are the traditional occupants of Australia. Torres Strait Island people originate from the islands between Papua New Guinea and Queensland (Solonec, 2015). Both groups have populations within Australia, and when able to, distinction will be made through use of the specific clan title, for example Gurindji people.

Bamblett, Lovett, Gorringer, and Fogarty, 2013). From there I also became interested in the various ways that people can and do exhibit agency and challenge power structures; specifically I became interested in the way that, for example, alternative media, could do this.

## **1.2. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS**

With the above-mentioned in mind, the aim of this research is to explore the extent to which alternative media sources can challenge normative representations of Indigenous peoples and provide an opportunity for alternate representations, specifically expressions of agency and empowerment.

My main research question is:

How do representations of Indigenous peoples of Australia (broadcast through alternative media) contest the usually negative representations dominant in mainstream Australian media, and what are the implications of this for development among Australian Indigenous communities?

Research sub-questions:

1. How is Indigenous development represented by media in Australia?
2. How might the representations of Indigenous Australians put forward by alternative media contribute to development aspirations of agency and empowerment?

These questions will be addressed through a comprehensive review of literature, and through critical analysis of alternative media articles. Through this methodology, the research will provide evidence of the importance of alternative media in contesting homogenising or problematising discourses so readily available in mainstream media. To do this, it is necessary to first discuss the context from which the current framings of the Indigenous populations of Australia have emerged. In the following section I will provide

an overview of the historical and contemporary progress in Indigenous development in Australia for the purpose of establishing a background to this research project.

### **1.3. RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

The use of quantifiable development indices for the establishment of comparative data between indigenous and non-indigenous populations has been argued to be Eurocentric and failing to recognise the diversity and wellbeing indicators self-identified by indigenous peoples (Prout, 2012). That said, some development indices will be drawn on to contribute to the establishment of the current situation of Indigenous peoples as a population in Australia. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) also acknowledges the challenges associated with gathering statistics of targeted indigenous populations and goes on to state that, despite these

it is possible to build a picture of indigenous peoples' social and economic development through the use of selected national and regional information, and through analysis of information gleaned from the Human Development Index and the Human Poverty Index. (UNPFII, 2009: 22)

For that reason, the following section will illustrate some of the pivotal gaps in development between Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Australia.

There are over 600,000 citizens of Australia who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011) and they are recognised as being the oldest known living genetic line in history –some 75,000 years old (Rasmussen et al., 2011). The UN report, *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, first published in 2009, is framed around issues identified within the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2007). The 2009 publication clearly affirms that indigenous marginalisation is evident within even the highest ranking countries as measured against the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Indices<sup>4</sup> (HDI). In 2001 Australia was ranked with the highest discrepancy

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<sup>4</sup> The HDI is calculated by measuring a country or population's average achievements in health, education and standard of living (GDP per capita) (UNPFII, 2009: 23)

between indigenous and non-indigenous development. In 2001, Australia was ranked third on the HDI whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were ranked 103<sup>rd</sup>, a confronting one hundred place difference (UNPFII, 2009). In 2015 the second edition of the *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* was published. Focusing on health, this report again highlights the disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Australia. For example, Australia has a current HDI ranking of second in the world, and yet the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is twenty years. Australian Indigenous life expectancy is on par with that of Nepal, a country with an HDI ranking of 157<sup>th</sup> in the world (UNPFII, 2015: 042). While such statistics are quite shocking, it is also important to recognise the severe impacts that they represent on individual human lives.

We have all heard them - the figures of death and of disability - every few years the figures are repeated and excite attention. But I suspect that most Australians accept them as being almost inevitable... The statistics of infant and perinatal mortality are our babies and children who die in our arms. The statistics of shortened life expectancy are our mothers and fathers, uncles, aunties and Elders who live diminished lives and die before their gifts of knowledge and experience are passed on. We die silently under these statistics. (Dodson, 1994 as cited in Solonec, 2012: 2)

Increasing attention is being paid to indigenous rights around the world<sup>5</sup> and yet Australia continues to perpetuate marginalising discourses and poor treatment of its indigenous peoples (Reconciliation Australia, 2012; UNPFII, 2009). Development outcomes are poor and Indigenous knowledge and cultures continue to be situated outside the discursive norm, contributing to disempowerment and a sense of redundancy for many. The following section will provide an overview of the process of colonisation and a brief look at land rights in Australia.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1965, the United Nations adopted the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination which comprises of 25 articles aimed at prohibiting and eliminating racial discrimination. In 2002, the UN held its first meeting of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and in 2007 adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which provides a universal framework for the protection and consideration of Indigenous rights around the world. Australia was one of four countries to vote against the Declaration, 143 voted in favour and 11 abstained (UNPFII, 2009; UN 2015a)

## 1.4. RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Colonisation of Australia began with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, led by Governor Phillip. During this period Australia was declared *terra nullius*, meaning that the land was empty and unoccupied (Banner, 2005; Watson, 2014). In the face of growing evidence that Australia was in fact occupied, the definition of *terra nullius* was amended: “the land (is determined) as unoccupied because of the lack of a legal system and a *structured society*” (Milano, 2006: 73, emphasis added). After further evidence that Australia did in fact have a structured society in the form of Aboriginal cultures, the ruling was once again amended, this time to include the criterion of European standards. “Social and legal local organisations did not satisfy the European standards of civilisation, and therefore should be considered as non-existent from a legal point of view” (Milano, 2006: 73). Astoundingly, it was not until the milestone *Mabo v State of Queensland* High Court case of 1982-1992 that the Indigenous peoples of Australia were legitimately recognised as inhabiting Australia prior to the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. The Mabo case resulted in elimination of the *terra nullius* Australian law in 1992 (ABS, 2012; Ivison, 1997) however the significance of this remains contentious in the face of increasing disparities in development indices and ongoing dispossession of land<sup>6</sup> (Watson, 2014). There was, however, some significant progress towards recognition of Indigenous land rights in the 1970s.

In August of 1975, Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972-1975) travelled to the traditional homelands of the Aboriginal Gurindji people, 600km south of Darwin in the Northern Territory. The aim of Whitlam’s visit was to reconcile a decade long protest that began with the Wave Hill Strike. In August of 1966, 200 Aboriginal men employed as stockmen walked off Wave Hill Station and with family in tow, marched 30km north to the Wave Hill Welfare Settlement. They were protesting for equal employment conditions and wages, “they were finished with being treated like dogs. They

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<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have deep-seeded connections to their lands. Anaya states that this connection “forms an essential part of their cultural and spiritual life and material wellbeing” (Anaya, 2010: 11).



were tired of waiting for promises...to be kept” (Riddett, 1997: 53). Over time the Wave Hill protests evolved into a more holistic call across Australia for Aboriginal rights and recognition of traditional land entitlements, culminating with the visit from Prime Minister Whitlam in 1975 (Baker, 1992; Jennett, 2011; Riddett, 1997).

The Gurindji people who had been protesting for Aboriginal rights for a decade were finally met with on fair and equal ground. Whitlam returned the land to the traditional owners, in the form of land deeds and legislation for future claims (Riddett, 1997). During the land transfer ceremony, Whitlam famously took a handful of red earth and poured it into the hands of Aboriginal leader Vincent Lingiari:

Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your hands this piece of the earth itself as a sign that we restore them to you and your children forever. (Gough Whitlam, August 16 1975<sup>7</sup>)

Whitlam followed through on the symbolic gesture with development and implementation of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* (1976). The Act was part of a new era for Indigenous rights in Australia, the first formal attempt by the Federal Government to recognise the longstanding history between Aboriginal peoples and their traditional lands. This Act allowed for Aboriginal people to make traditional land claims and although the Act had limitations it was seen as a genuine attempt at recognition of Aboriginal status as traditional occupiers of Australia (Baker, 1992). During his term as Prime Minister, Whitlam also ratified the United Nations (UN) *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1965) which comprises 25 articles aimed at prohibiting and eliminating racial discrimination (UN, 2015). Whitlam then went on to put into effect the *Australian Racial Discrimination Act* (1975).

Whitlam passed away in late 2014, at a time of highly controversial race relations in Australia. As highlighted above, development indices show huge disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian peoples. These disparities are the end result of ongoing marginalisation and flawed paternalist political policies, and I posit that this

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Croft, 2015: 245

approach to Indigenous development in Australia has been fuelled in part by the problematisation and homogenising discursive representations evident in mainstream media. I will now give a brief overview of the chapters that make up this research report.

## **1.5. RESEARCH PROJECT OUTLINED**

This research report is structured in the following way. Firstly, as seen chapter one introduces the study. Chapter two then establishes a research framework by examining the emergence of post-development theory and the power of language in the context of Indigenous development. Chapter three is a continuation of the literature review, with a more narrow investigation into the relationship between media and Indigenous development. In Chapter three I use a case example, the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act (2007), to show how mainstream media can problematise and homogenise Indigenous livelihoods.

Chapter four moves on to detail the methodology and ethical considerations of the research. Chapter five presents the research findings, specifically the key themes and information sources identified within alternative media news articles.

The final chapter, six, draws together findings and key points from Chapters 2, 3 and 5 to achieve the research aim and answer the research questions set out in Chapter 1.

## **Chapter 2: DEVELOPMENT AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE**

The aim of this chapter is to establish a framework for analysis, for the purpose of investigating the relationship between Indigenous development and the media in Australia. 'Indigenous development' is not one discreet approach to development, rather indigenous development has been influenced by changes in development thinking over time, alongside political imperatives of different governance structures. For example, Australian Indigenous health policy has historically been self-determinist, focussing on community-led and managed primary health care services, yet the 1990s saw a shift toward individual responsibility and mainstreaming of primary health care, reflective of neoliberal development (McCallum, 2013). In this chapter, I review the various positions within development thinking that have had particular importance for conceptualising and practising indigenous development. In particular, I will draw on Maiava and King's ideas in their article *Pacific indigenous development and post-intentional realities* (2007) to develop an indigenous development framework for the purpose of examining agency and empowerment through the medium of media. The work of key post-development thinkers will be examined, in particular their contributions to understanding the power of language in development practice and theory. A short trajectory of development will now be presented, leading into a discussion on discourse and the role of the media in promoting or supressing the agency and empowerment of Indigenous peoples of Australia.

### **2.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE CULTURAL TURN**

Development can be described as having four general theoretical categories, from which there are various subsidiaries. Potter classifies these as: the classical-traditional approach; the historical-empirical approach; the radical political-economy-dependency approach and the bottom-up and alternative approaches (Potter, 2008: 69). To illustrate the theoretical differences between these categories, Potter places each on a framework comprising four axes: normative theory; holistic; positive theory and economic. For this research report, bottom-up and alternative approaches are

particularly important as they are focussed on emancipation and empowerment and because indigenous development is usually identified as an ‘alternative’ approach to development. Alternative development includes many subsidiary approaches to development, such as sustainable development<sup>8</sup>, eco-development, agropolitan, basic needs and bottom-up development (Potter, 2008: 69). These theories sit on the junction of the holistic and normative axes, whilst neoliberal and modernisation theories are located solely on the economic axis (ibid). Alternative development grew in response to the dominance of neoliberalism and modernisation in development practice and the realisation that there was a reversal in development for many developing countries<sup>9</sup> around the world. Prior to the alternative development movement, practice and theory strongly emphasised a need for developing countries to catch up with “and generally imitat[e] the West” (Desai and Potter, 2008: 1). In the section that follows I outline the emergence and key characteristics of alternative development in more depth.

### **2.1.1. The impasse in development**

The 1980s marked a significant period in history for many developing countries as economic crises on par with the United States Great Depression<sup>10</sup> were experienced (Kydland and Zarazaga, 2002: 154). The 1980s became known as the *lost decade* (Booth, 1993) for those experiencing the crises and a period of *impasse* for development practitioners and theorists. Due in part to the economic crises experienced during this decade, development theorists and practitioners began to recognise the need for a fundamental shift in the way development was applied and theorised.

To turn beliefs of long standing upside is no easy task, not least because it is frustrating to think that one may have been treading an exhausting path down the wrong track. (Max-Neef, 1992: 31)

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<sup>8</sup> Recently sustainable development has been normalised as, in 2015, the United Nations has developed and adopted the *Agenda for Sustainable Development* and subsequent *Sustainable Development Goals* (UN, 2015b)

<sup>9</sup> The label ‘developing countries’ is used throughout this paper, in preference over 3<sup>rd</sup> World or Global South and North. I understand these labels are all contested concepts but for the ease of writing I have selected developing and developed regions as the preferred descriptor unless quoting a source

<sup>10</sup> For example, in the 1980s Argentina’s GDP fell 33%. During the U.S Great Depression GDP fell 35% but began to recover within four years. Argentina experienced this trough for ten years (Kydland and Zarazaga, 2002: 154).

David Booth's seminal paper, *Marxism and Development Sociology: Interpreting the Impasse* (1985) addressed the "increasingly uneasy feeling within the discipline that old certainties were fading away" (Schoorman, 2008: 13). The *impasse* as described by Booth was a period in which practitioners lost faith in the theoretical underpinnings that had so strongly dominated development for decades, there was "stagnation and lacunae in current sociological development research" (Booth, 1985: 762) and a sense of defeat in that theorists were not able to hypothesise a solution to "fundamental issues of the third world" (ibid: 761). Booth proposed that development research needed to step up from purely theoretical to a more introspective meta-theoretical approach. In the final statement by Booth, he says that

along with a revitalized [sic] interest in the real-world problems of development policy and practice, an enhanced sensitivity to questions of this type seems essential if we are to get out and stay out of the impasse. (Booth, 1985: 777)

Schoorman traces the root cause of the *impasse* back to three interrelating paradigms. The first is that development strategies and policies homogenised all those in the developing world. In other words, all developing regions were subject to a one-size-fits-all development strategy that failed to recognise diversity, agency and individualism of the target regions (Schoorman, 2008). All developing nations were subject to the same solutions, predominantly based on the premise that modernisation was needed if countries were to make progress. In Lummis' analysis of equality he depicts development as a plight to homogenise and normalise societies through the adoption of universal markers of comparative progress, at the expense of cultural diversity (Lummis, 1992; McGregor, 2009). "All the world's cultures can be measured against a single 'standard of living' measure....It disposes the world's peoples of their own indigenous notions of prosperity" (Lummis, 1992: 50).

The second paradigm of influence regarding the *impasse* was the unrelenting belief in the ostensible success of the European industrialisation period as a blueprint for all future development and progress. The advantages of capitalist growth and trickle-down economics were first proposed by Adam Smith in 1776 (Aghion and Bolton, 1997; Braeman, 2014; Butler, 2011). Trickle-down economics posits that the "the accumulation of wealth by the rich is good for the poor since some of the increased wealth of the rich

trickles down to the poor” (Aghion and Bolton, 1997: 151). It became apparent in the decade of the *impasse* that wealth was not trickling down to the poor, the wealth gap between developing and developed countries was in fact widening. Schuurman describes the economic policies of developed countries in the lead up to the *lost decade* as “short-term policies aimed at keeping their heads above water in terms of debt” (1993:10).

The final point for discussion in regards to factors contributing to the *impasse* is the dominance of the state as a term of reference to gauge success of development projects (Schuurman, 2008: 15). During the 1990s, as discourses on globalisation increased, there was increasing realisation that using the state as a frame of reference for development was linked with the new global markets and economic relations between countries (ibid: 14). As a consequence, there was a growing recognition of the importance of localised development goals and evaluation of efficacy of projects. Alternative development is centred around participation with stakeholders at a community level (Pieterse, 2000) and will be discussed in the following section.

### **2.1.2. An alternative development**

Development practitioners and authors continue to research effective solutions in light of ever-increasing disparities not only *between* the North and South, but *within* borders (Schuurman, 2008). While grand theories such as neoliberalism continue to dominate development theory and practice there is an increasing awareness of the significant role that bottom up and alternative approaches play in sustainable and effective development practice. Manfred Max-Neef is a key player in the alternative development movement. His landmark book *From the Outside Looking In* (first published in 1982) is commonly cited as a seminal piece of alternative development theory (Abrahamsen, 2006).

Max-Neef’s book details his participatory grassroots work with two communities in Latin America. In the section aptly titled *Testimony as an Alternative*, he describes his realisation that top-down, macro level development strategies simply do not work. He tells of the invisibility of over half the world’s populations in these strategies of “gigantism” (Max-Neef, 1992: 117). Not only does Max-Neef provide compelling evidence for the need to reassess what development goals should actually be prioritised, he also provides verbatim statements from stakeholders describing their experiences with development projects and what they value as priorities for development. “We have no

means to build the road. But they come here with bulldozers to take away the archaeological gold” (Community member of Mariano Acosta cited in Max-Neef, 1992: 90).

Although alternative development was characterised by grassroots action, some of its central tenets (particularly participation and engagement with stakeholders) were seen as valuable even by large multilateral development agencies (such as the World Bank), who adopted participatory and grassroots principles to the point of rhetoric. The World Bank’s *Voices of the Poor* project aimed to share the views of 60,000 people from 60 countries. The theme was poverty and development and the methodology emphasised participatory identification of key issues (The World Bank Group, 2012). However, rather than being satisfied with the global uptake of his contributions, Max-Neef argued that the inherent power held by international institutions and their ability to “pour old wine into new bottles” (Abrahamsen, 2006: 175) meant they could adopt the rhetoric without necessarily changing fundamental practice. In other words, buzzwords such as *actor-oriented*, *participatory* and *empowerment* became universal components of development discourse, whilst perhaps masking the individual priorities and motivations of those using them (Abrahamsen, 2006; Cornwall, 2007). The vocabulary of alternative development was at risk of losing its original meanings and power as it was adopted by organisations with contrasting visions and philosophies. The discourse of development is a key theoretical underpinning of this research report and I will now review of the some of the key literature around this. The following section begins with a conceptualisation of discourse studies and post-development.

## **2.2. THE POWER OF LANGUAGE**

The examination of discourse is a diverse field, not exclusive to one academic school or discipline (such as linguistics or social sciences). Discourse studies is rather a heterogeneous field that draws from a wide range of disciplines including sociology, philosophy, history and anthropology (Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak, 2014: 1). It is possible however to delineate discourse studies into two broad approaches or applications. The first application primarily concerns linguistics and semantics, which is the process of language production. This approach examines discourse at the micro-



sociological level. The second application of discourse studies take a more macro-sociological approach to analysis (ibid). Discourse is understood as both “verbal and non-verbal practices of large social communities” (Angermuller et al., 2014: 2). The macro-sociological approach to discourse studies examines inherent power relations through analysis of words and statements made but also those words and statements left *unsaid* (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). This approach to discourse studies has a significant place in development theory, as it was adopted by a strong contingent of development theorists during the *impasse*. Arturo Escobar was one such theorist who applied macro-level discourse analysis to the language of development. In his seminal text, *Encountering Development: The making and unmaking of the third world* (1995), Escobar questions normative representations of developing regions and challenges the inherent power assumptions between those *doing* development and those *receiving* it. The impact of Escobar’s work was such that a new branch of development theory was coined: post-development.

### **2.2.1. The emergence of post-development**

Escobar draws on the representations of “African” famine in the 1960s and 1970s to illustrate his concerns with the power embedded within the application of labels to entire populations, as though that label represents a diverse group as all holding the same qualities or characteristics. Through media, images of the malnourished child were projected into the home, followed by requests for “adoption” of the child. This example clearly illustrates the intrinsic power imbalances between developed and developing regions. “A whole economy of discourse and unequal power relations is encoded in that body”, consequently dehumanising the subject and representing him as helpless (Escobar, 2012: 103). A second point of relevance for the current research is Escobar’s recognition of the assumption that indigenous groups needed to modernise through adoption of the “right” values and practices, namely those of the white minority (ibid: 45). Critiques of this will be discussed later. Following publication of *Encountering Development* in 1995, critics and reviewers coined a new theoretical branch of development that split development practice into two: the theoretical critique of development and the more practical application of development practice at the ground level (Jakimow, 2008). Escobar’s work is commonly associated with the field of post-development:



A rich debate ensued that, paradoxically, contributed to cementing a “postdevelopment” position by lumping together a handful of authors and books that the critics saw as sharing, broadly, the same perspective. (Escobar, 2012: xiii)

Despite Escobar’s apparent frustrations, the title post-development has since been widely adopted and applied to those theorists critical of the historically dominant, top-down approaches to development practice such as modernisation theory. On reflecting on his original edition of *Encountering Development*, Escobar describes the theory of post-development as

an analysis of development as a set of discourses and practices that had profound impact on how Asia, Africa and Latin America came to be seen as ‘underdeveloped’ and treated as such. (Escobar, 2012: xii)

In his critique, Escobar proposed that there be an urgent need to overhaul the theory and practices underpinning development. The first change needed was to remove development deficits from the centre of discursive representations of developing regions.

When relying on development deficits to represent regions, the subject becomes framed within a narrative of deficiency, or in other words lacking something that others have (Fforde et al., 2013). In the context of Indigenous Australia, Fforde et al. (2013) reflect on the growing body of international knowledge correlating deficit representations of indigenous groups with development outcomes. They also suggest that there is little understanding of the influence of deficiency narratives in the Indigenous Australian context beyond the scope of school education outcomes. In the year prior to Fforde et al.’s publication, *The Media and Indigenous Policy: How news media reporting and mediatized practice impact on Indigenous policy*<sup>11</sup> was published. This is a comprehensive report investigating the relationships between news media and Indigenous social development policies in Australia (McCallum (Ed.), 2012a; McCallum, Meadows, Waller, Dunne Breen and Reid, 2012). The authors reviewed news media between 1998 and 2008 and concluded that there is a direct relationship between the chosen depiction or framing of Indigenous issues in media and subsequent Indigenous policy development. While this

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<sup>11</sup> Henceforth referred to as the MIPR (2012)

study shows that there are some small shifts towards more positive framings of Indigenous development in the media, the overall representation continues to be one of deficits and problems. Roy says that “even when positive representation is attempted, as in the case of some sport reportage, representations can invoke stereotypes, reinforcing the racist discourse” (Roy, 2013: 18).

Through an understanding of the common deficit representations of Indigenous Australians, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of habitus can provide one understanding of the outcomes of this form of representation. Bourdieu contends that labels can influence the way a person thinks, feels and acts (Moncrieffe, 2007). It is an internal process, usually beginning in childhood (Dumais, 2002) that can lead to a subconscious change in the identity of the individual to fulfil the label’s assumptions. In other words, “negative dispositions can be reproduced, including how these dispositions are reinforced and challenged by the extant social relations and structures” (Moncrieffe, 2007: 81). In summary, deficit discourses can have an impact at the individual level, for example self-worth and cultural identity and also at the more macro-level of social policy.

Whilst not all post-development authors specifically address indigenous development, there are some similarities in the fundamentals of the theories and common critiques tend to moulded around similar tenets. I will now discuss Indigenous development before reviewing common criticisms of both Indigenous development and post-development.

### **2.2.2. Indigenous knowledge and development**

The 1960s and 1970s saw an increased awareness of Indigenous development needs and recognition of historical injustices. In addition to Australia’s adoption of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* (1976) and the *Racial Discrimination Act* (1975). In 1972 the United Nations launched the Martinez Cobo study (UN, 2009d), the first study to not only highlight but quantifiably demonstrate the ongoing marginalisation and discrimination of indigenous groups around the world. This study led to the establishment of the first Indigenous-specific branch of the UN, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Sub-Commission, in 1989 (UN, 2009d). Since then, indigenous development has continued to develop and grow as a diverse and highly valuable field.

Maiava and King attempt to conceptualise indigenous development, acknowledging the complexities involved in doing so. They describe it as an intentional form of development, as opposed to immanent, that can be “both seeking advancement and halting deterioration” (Maiava and King, 2007: 85). They draw from conclusions of research by Maiava where she proposes a new theory of development of which the principles, outlined in Table 1, need to “guide behaviour and the responses to development interventions” (Maiava, 2001: 219). Each of the principles is integral to how indigenous development has been conceptualised for this research report.

Table 1: Five principles for indigenous development	
Principle <sup>12</sup>	Goal
Psychological empowerment	Self-esteem and self-worth must be preserved to ensure cultural identities and integrity are maintained and promoted.
Social inclusion	Inclusion within family, community and wider societal levels including government.
Control of one's life	Principles of agency and empowerment underpin this principle which understands that macro-level “interventions” to address Indigenous development disempower individuals and communities.
The ability to be free, active and independent	Directly related to agency; to create a space in which one can be autonomous, identify and prioritise his or her own goals and be able to action those accordingly
The need to support family	An all-encompassing principle which incorporates individual empowerment and agency with intact psychological welfare and identity; the development of sustainable and secure households

In the context of development, indigenous knowledge has historically been sidelined in preference for global economic growth and modernisation: “Indigenous development...has been hidden for decades, unrecognized [*sic*] as the source of viable alternative development strategies and instead has at times been considered problematic or the cause of [development] failures” (Maiava and King, 2007: 47). The integration of indigenous knowledge into development practice increased during and following the *impasse*, ascertained as a possible solution to the increasing disparities between developing and developed nations (Briggs, 2005). However, Briggs identifies and discusses some fundamental challenges and issues with the “conceptualization [*sic*] and deployment of indigenous knowledge in development planning and implementation”

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from Maiava's *A Clash of Paradigms* (2001: 219-220).

(2005: 99). Interestingly, there are overlaps between Briggs' identified issues with the adoption of indigenous knowledge and the key criticisms of early post-development and I will discuss these now.

### **2.2.3. Criticisms of post-development and indigenous development**

Critiques of the importance of discourse and representations of populations in development are essentially shaped around three main criticisms: the romanticisation of indigenous knowledge, the lack of alternative solutions to address poverty and the homogenisation of developing regions as lacking agency. Similarly, indigenous development has been criticised for romanticising Indigenous livelihoods, for homogenising regions and for creating binaries between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge.

Post-development received criticism that deconstruction of dominant discourses in favour of indigenous culture and beliefs romanticised indigenous development and failed to acknowledge the benefits of modernisation. Appreciation and adoption of indigenous knowledge for development was understood by critics to presume all indigenous knowledge as good and unchanging, frozen in time (Briggs, 2005). To illustrate this conundrum, I will draw from the West Australian Government's current proposal to close remote Aboriginal communities due to budget constraints and poor development outcomes. Closure of communities fails to respect the right to self-determination and yet these communities are deprived of varying basic needs. To romanticise the current situation would be to ignore or disregard the urgent need for change in the affected communities. On the other hand, top-down Government policy fails to recognise the fundamental rights of those peoples affected by the proposal. In his review of mental health service provision in remote Indigenous communities, Hunter (2007) reflects on the redundancy this romanticising of remote living: "the lives of most Aboriginal people living in remote communities and on the fringes of rural towns are not romantic – they are hard" (ibid: 91). That is not to say that they should therefore be displaced to central towns, but rather that strategies must be developed in partnership with stakeholders who are the best and only determiner of what is "romantic" in their lives and what needs to change.

The second criticism of post-development to be discussed is that its proponents overlook poverty and capitalism, seen as the foremost challenge in development. Ziai goes so far as to situate post-development alongside neoliberalism:

because it rejects the idea of development aid, because it relies not on a strong state, but on ‘civil society’ and the self-help powers of the people and because it questions the materialist view of prosperity and, by implication, the necessity of redistributive policies. (Ziai, 2004: 1049)

This terse description of post-development is somewhat reflected in Pieterse’s review of post-development, in which he describes post-development as letting “the development responsibility of states and institutions off the hook” (2000: 187) and placing the task of progress solely into the hands of the poor. However, post-development theory was not seeking to establish a new space in which state was removed entirely from the application of development. Rather, post-development simply called for recognition of power imbalances that were evident in top-down development and alternatives or solutions to this gradually emerged as the theory matured. Similarly, Indigenous development is criticised for creating binaries between western science and indigenous knowledge systems, creating somewhat of a power imbalance when one is positioned as being more beneficial or valid than another (Briggs, 2005: 99).

The final criticism to be discussed here is that the theories undertook their own form of homogenisation, failing to identify diversity amongst development theorist and stakeholders. They also failed to acknowledge any agentic contestation occurring at the grassroots level of development. In other words, post-development inadvertently labelled the developing as marginalised and lacking agency to determine their own pathways, unable to advocate or determine their priorities (Escobar, 2012: xv; Lie, 2008; McGregor, 2009). Again, the rebuttal to this is that the purpose of the deconstruction was to analyse the “overall discursive fact, not how that fact might have been contested and hybridized [*ibid*] on the ground” (Escobar, 2012: xiv).

Indigenous development has also been criticised for failing to recognise agency of stakeholders, tending instead to group communities as holding one particular knowledge and ignoring “the unevenness and often fragmentary and mediated nature of indigenous knowledge and how such knowledge can become quite differentiated across

a community” (Briggs, 2005: 105). Based on Briggs’ analysis of indigenous knowledge and development, to address the limitations highlighted, indigenous knowledge and development needs to be approached at an interface with western science and knowledge. This reflects the conceptualisation of empowerment by the Wunan Foundation (2015) and will be discussed in the upcoming section about the new wave of post-development.

Finally, in response to criticisms that post-development also did not propose solutions for increasing inequalities, post-development evolved into a more encompassing and active discipline. Jakimow posits that the two distinct binaries of development practice evident in the 1990s (the critics and the practitioners) are now beginning to come together into a more reflexive development (2008: 312). There is a uniting consensus amongst post-development theorists that “words, languages and representations have very real impacts on people’s lives” (McGregor, 2009: 1692). However, McGregor then goes beyond this to propose that for post-development to survive as a coherent theory, there must be a transition from futility to hope and possibility (2009: 1688). Therefore solutions and strategies are proposed whilst remaining conscious of the inherent power relations within development discourse. The evolution of post-development into one of action and strategy, termed *hopeful post-development*, sees the theory align itself alongside those of alternative development to some degree. Hopeful post-development will now be examined for its contributions to understanding the significance of power relations and imbalances in reference to Australian Indigenous development.

### **2.3. HOPEFUL POST-DEVELOPMENT: ACTORS, AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT**

Alternative solutions to development generally require participatory engagement at the grass-roots, however solutions remain largely technocratic. To quote McGregor, “it is here that post-development differs from many alternative approaches as inequalities are perceived through political rather than technical lenses” (2009: 1696). True participatory development should be measured by both macro (political representation for example) and micro achievements, rather than solely by the outputs of a process. This contrast between alternative and post-development is further

reiterated by Pieterse, who clearly delineates alternative and post-development into two distinct categories based on the preference of the earlier to focus on grass-roots and the later to address both grass-roots and macro-level change (Pieterse, 2000).

Rather than calling for abandonment of development, post-development now attempts to create new discourses and practices (Gibson-Graham, 2010: 226) first by recognising the knowledge deficit of the practitioners and policy-implementers rather than presuming the knowledge deficit lies with the stakeholders. This is a substantial shift in power from those historically “doing” development to those who express a need or desire for progress. In other words, practitioners need to “[look] at how development actors have agency to shape places and development and/or seek alternatives to it” (McGregor, 2009: 1696). This shift in power allows for local empowerment and emergence of contextual and practical visions for development (Gibson-Graham, 2010: 229). Hopeful post-development recognises the fundamental need for actor-oriented development strategies and the importance of agency and empowerment when considering pathways for change or growth (McGregor, 2009). These are key theoretical concepts underpinning this research report and will each be discussed in more detail.

### **2.3.1. Actor-oriented development**

Actor-oriented development requires the identification of priorities as defined by those directly involved and affected by the deficits or struggles in question. Actor-oriented perspectives explicitly acknowledge power differences between actors and the hierarchical nature of development. In regards to development practice, this can be identified through transformation of the question “*works for whom*” from an inquisitive or critical viewpoint to a position of action and activism (Nyamu-Musembi, 2005: 41). Nyamu-Musembi defines actor-oriented development as

an understanding of human rights needs and priorities that is informed by the concrete experiences of the particular actors involved in and who stand to gain directly from the struggles in question. (Nyamu-Musembi, 2002: 1)

It can be seen as a micro-level approach to development, but should not exclude collaboration with structural-level development. Booth proposed that actor-oriented approaches still require partnership with macro-level theories and practices as the alternative may leave projects fragmented and heavily resource dependent (1993).



Therefore, actor-oriented approaches must involve addressing and readjusting the power balance between stakeholders and drivers of development to ensure true partnership is achieved. Actor-oriented approaches recognise the capacity-potential of people to negotiate, challenge and transform interventions that impact on their livelihoods (Herbert-Cheshire, 2003: 455). In Chapter one, I discussed the Wave Hill protests which were the first step in securing the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* (1976), which in effect returned half of the land in the NT to its traditional owners (Amnesty International, 2011ab; Tonkinson, 2007). These protests against human rights violations demonstrate the capacity-potential of people to determine their own livelihood development. These protests are also an example of human agency.

### **2.3.2. Agency in development**

The concept of human agency can be positioned alongside actor-oriented perspectives, but is more commonly associated with empowerment. Ahearn reflects on the challenges of defining agency and the implications for poorly thought out framing of the concept: “scholars often fail to recognize [*sic*] that the particular ways in which they conceive of agency have implications for the understanding of personhood, causality, action and intention” (2001: 112). This salient point returns the discussion to previous considerations of the inherent power of discourse. Therefore, careful consideration is paid to the conceptualisation of human agency for the purpose of analysing representations of Indigenous Australians through media.

Drydyk defines agency as “the scope of actions that a person could be involved in bringing about” (2013: 251), or the degree to which a person is involved in a course of action. Ahearn contributes to the conceptualisation of agency by defining it as “the *socioculturally mediated* [*italics added*] capacity to act” (2001: 113). Post-development, in its formative years, received criticism for homogenising developing regions as lacking agency to elicit change, “constructing them as helpless victims whose cultures are inevitably erased and replaced by a homogenising modernism” (McGregor, 2009: 1694). It was with the transition to a more hopeful perspective that post-development began to move away from an inquisition into limitations of development to “a much wider range of discussions and possibilities based on ethical decision-making, cultural strengths and community enterprises”. Therefore, I build upon these considerations to conceptualise agency as the degree to which a person or group acts or has the capacity to act to elicit changes based upon personal experiences and direct knowledge of his or her society.



### 2.3.3. Empowerment and empowered communities

Empowerment refers to a process of change in which freedom of choice is expanded. To conceptualise empowerment, I will draw from the recently published and highly relevant *Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report* [ECEP Report] (Wunan Foundation, 2015). On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2015 the ECEP Report was released to the Australian Government. This landmark report is the product of collaboration between Indigenous leaders from eight regions across Australia and proposes a ten year framework for Indigenous policy and development. The ECEP Report begins by introducing what empowerment means to Indigenous peoples of Australia:

Empowerment, in our meaning, has two aspects. It means Indigenous people empowering ourselves by taking all appropriate and necessary powers and responsibilities for our own lives and futures. It also means Commonwealth, state and territory governments sharing and in some cases relinquishing, certain powers and responsibilities and supporting Indigenous people with resources and capability building. (Wunan Foundation, 2015: iii)

It can be inferred based on this definition that, for development to be effective, there must be ownership and action at the grassroots or community level. This can be achieved by firstly recognising development priorities and secondly by partnership with government in building capacity for Indigenous people to elicit change.

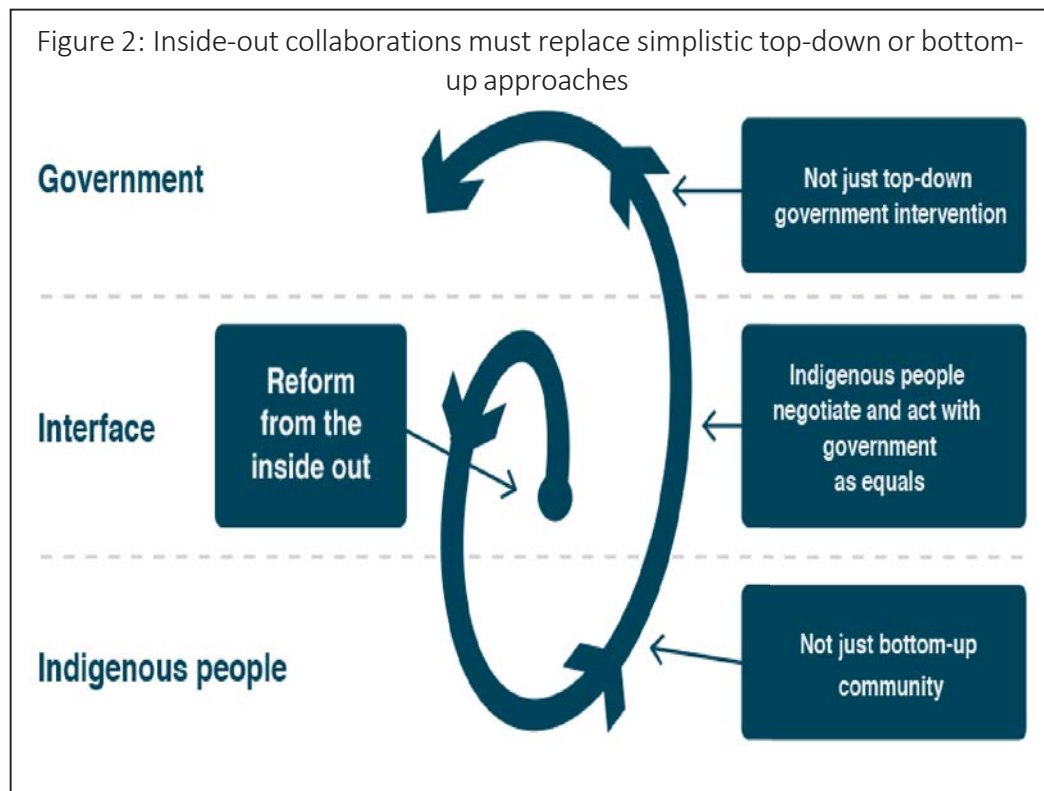
The ECEP Report posits that both top-down (for example neo-liberal) and bottom-up (for example alternative) approaches to development have failed Indigenous Australia, calling both approaches overly simplistic. What is suggested is the need for *inside-out* development approaches in which community members and government meet at an interface where all contributions are equal. Figure 2 illustrates the inside-out collaboration model as presented in the ECEP Report<sup>13</sup> (Wunan Foundation, 2015: 43).

The ECEP Report (2015) proposes that there is a preliminary need for an *inside-out* approaches to development, replacing the binaries of top down and bottom up approaches to development. Figure 2 illustrates that this approach is centred around an

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<sup>13</sup> Reproduced with permission under Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Australia license (Wunan Foundation, 2015).

interface, which is neither Indigenous people nor the Government. This interface is a space where both parties meet as equals to negotiate pathways and goals. The need to move away from the dominance of the deficit rhetoric is highlighted: “Indigenous affairs continues to be viewed through the prism of deficit... Instead, we should focus on the goal of development, achieved through a policy of Indigenous empowerment.” (Wunan Foundation, 2015: 13).



The ECEP Report highlights the complexity of achieving empowerment and is in keeping with Drydyk’s comprehensive critique of the rhetoric of agency and empowerment, in which he states that empowerment loses its power when considered as merely an extension of agency. Rather, empowerment is both an expansion of agency and an encompassment of the concept of “well-being that agency cannot have” (Drydyk, 2013: 250). If agency is seen as the *action* of change, empowerment is the overarching *process*. Returning to the example of the Wave Hill protests, the actor-oriented perspective was evident in the resistance to inherent power imbalances impeaching on Aboriginal land rights. One could argue that human agency was evident in the decision to return to the outstations and homelands, whilst empowerment was evident and developing throughout the entirety of the protests and subsequent returns to the

traditional lands. These three concepts are key to the framework of hopeful post-development.

McGregor states that for development to be successful there needs to be both macro and micro achievements and that inequalities must be perceived through a political rather than technical lens (2009). The ECEP Report reflects a hopeful post-development framework in its conceptualisation of empowerment through collaboration and participation at both the grassroots and government levels (Wunan Foundation, 2015). An example of the mobilisation of hopeful post-development can be seen in the medium of alternative media as a means of contesting homogenising discourses (McGregor, 2009). This will be discussed in Chapter 3.

## **2.4. CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS**

Reflective of the macro-sociological application of discourse studies, within post-development there is emphasis on deconstructing texts to “highlight and destabilise the truth claims and power relationships contained within” (McGregor, 2009: 1689). This is based on the premise that embedded power within text then constructs a new space in which a particular view point is legitimised and normalised, providing rationale for certain practices and solutions to constructed problems (Aldrich, Zwi and Short, 2007; Bennett, 2012; Escobar, 2012; McGregor, 2009). Through the contributions of Maiava and King (2007), McCallum (2012ab; 2013), McGregor (2009), Pieterse (2000) and the Wunan Foundation (2015) I propose that a comprehensive conceptualisation of development requires collaboration at an interface central to the needs of the stakeholder whilst engaging with the state. There must be recognition and ownership of state-led processes that cause marginalisation and discrimination of Indigenous Australians, as well as rejection of romantic notions that remote community life be frozen and preserved. I also propose that there is an urgent need to remove deficit discourses from the centre of discursive representations of Indigenous Australians as these have negative effects for both the individual and community. Based on McGregor’s conceptualisation of hopeful post-development, agency and empowerment are essential to effect positive and sustainable change.

In this chapter I have discussed the cultural shift in development and the space for hopeful post-development within Indigenous development. Alternative media productions are one medium of hopeful post-development (McGregor, 2009) and are a means of disseminating messages of agency and empowerment. The following chapter investigates the role of Australian media in constructing a particular “Indigenous” identity and the implications for this in Indigenous development.

## **Chapter 3: MEDIA AND INDIGNEOUS DEVELOPMENT**

This chapter is presented in two parts: definitions of media; and representations of Indigenous issues in media including one case study drawn upon to highlight the influence of media for Indigenous development. The way in which media select key aspects of an issue and balance the representation of that issue are paramount in how the issue comes to be understood and subsequently accepted or contested by the wider public. In this chapter I will examine ways in which media represents social and political issues central to development by reviewing research into the ways mainstream and alternative media sources in Australia frame Indigenous issues. I will conclude this chapter with a more specific discussion around the role of alternative media both globally and within Australia. First and foremost, what distinguishes alternative from mainstream media?

### **3.1. ALTERNATIVE AND MASS MEDIA DEFINITIONS**

Media encompasses a vast expanse of mediums, such as newspapers, television, books, magazines and increasingly internet. Not only are there a range of mediums, but who or how media is produced has a significant impact on content covered and frames used. For example, research by McCallum, et al. (2012b) identified mainstream media as highly influential on Indigenous policy in Australia and that politicians were acutely aware of this and manipulated or shaped media coverage to specifically drive their agendas. Distinguishing between mainstream and alternative media is rather contentious. Atton reviews varying definitions of alternative media over ten pages in his book *Alternative Media* (2002) and key themes that emerge are that alternative media represents “challenges to hegemony” (Atton, 2002: 19), can produce a voice for the marginalised and is not motivated by profit. However, research conducted by Rauch (2015) found that people do not always see this latter point a criteria for alternative media. “Respondents valued alternative content (neglected issues, diverse voices, mobilizing [*sic*] information) more highly than alternative form (being non-profit, non-commercial, small-scale)” (Rauch, 2015: 124). Rauch goes on to argue that the “deluge of

alternate adjectives” (ibid: 125) such as independent media, radical media and communitarian media are perhaps redundant in the face of the growing conceptualisation and scope of alternative media.

Alternative media is increasingly seen as part of a continuum of a single media concept rather than a binary to mainstream media (Kenix, 2011; Rauch, 2015). In light of research findings by McCallum et al. (2012) that mainstream media is heavily influential on Indigenous development, alternative media is conceptualised as a separate category for this research report. By demarcating alternative and mainstream media producers, a clearer analysis and conclusion may be achieved. Indigenous media can be seen as a branch of alternative media, although it is still beneficial to review the history of indigenous media to establish whether the field of media has historically provided a space for agency and empowerment.

### **3.1.1. Indigenous media and development**

This section will briefly review the history of indigenous media and its contribution to agency and empowerment. Indigenous media has a history spanning some 160 years in Australia. *The Aboriginal* (also known as the *Flinders Island Chronicle*) was the first news source produced by an Aboriginal organisation in Australia, published in September 1836 (Morris and Meadows, 2003). Shohat and Stam define indigenous media as “the use of audio-visual technology (camcorders, VCRs) for the cultural and political purposes of indigenous peoples” (2014: 34) and despite referencing Aboriginal Australians as one of the highest contributors of indigenous media globally, fail to reflect the expansive history or developments in their simple definition of indigenous media.

Morris and Meadows describe the adoption of communication technologies by Indigenous groups not as simply a desire to learn new skills, but rather to complement and “[rediscover] the frameworks that have enabled them to survive into the new millennium” (2003: 71). To elaborate, while systems of Aboriginal communication were evident long before colonisation new means of transferring knowledge are also being adopted. Media productions can be used within populations to protect, promote and preserve knowledges unique to that population. An example of new technologies contributing to protection, promotion and preservation is currently underway in the NT. The project aims to digitise and archive footage of cultural practices (Barwick, Marett, Walsh, Reid and Ford, 2005). An offshoot of this project is the development of an app for

Marrithiyel<sup>14</sup> speakers which will give people throughout Australia access to learning the language (Ford in James, 2014).

Indigenous media is also utilised for the purpose of activism. Two international examples of this are summarised in Table 3. An interesting example of this may be seen in the 50 year campaign for West Papuan independence. In this case, heavily regulated press disempowers activists within West Papua from producing media to promote their campaign, repercussions of such productions include physical violence, intimidation and imprisonment. International organisations such as the Free West Papua Campaign have taken on the role of information dispersal, acting as representatives of those constrained within the region<sup>15</sup>. The following quote illustrates the complexity of indigenous activism through media when combined with such indoctrinated human rights violations:

Tell the world what is happening in West Papua. They will listen to you because you are Europeans. That is our only chance to get justice and freedom. Please, be our voice! (Mathias Wenda, West Papua Independence leader<sup>16</sup>)

Media activism has a long history in Indigenous Australia, although there was a stark increase in the number of Indigenous media producers in the late 1960s and 1970s (Morris and Meadows, 2003). The catalyst for the increase may have been decolonisation of many regions around the world and the increase in grassroots organisations supporting Indigenous rights. “The issues that fuelled the movement ranged from broken treaties and loss of land to discrimination, marginalization [*sic*], conflict and gross violations of human rights, including massacres” (Secretariat of the UNPFII, 2009: 2). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Aboriginal communities around Australia began to protest and “reject the living conditions they had to endure in the artificial communities created by settlements, reserves and missions” (Kerins, 2009: 1). It was during this period of time that the Wave Hill Strike began in the NT (see Chapter 1.5). The increase in media productions during this time enabled and empowered remote and distinct Aboriginal groups to come together in a message of solidarity and campaign for the rights to their traditional/ancestral lands (Kerins, 2009; Morris and Meadows, 2003).

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<sup>14</sup> Part of the Tyikim language group; spoken in the Daly Region of southwest Darwin; classified as an endangered language (Australian Indigenous Languages Database, 2014; James, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> See Table 3 for more information about this case study.

<sup>16</sup> Friends of Peoples Close to Nature-Germany, 2007 (Producers)



Table 3: Indigenous Activism and the Media-two international examples	
Region	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayan indigenous organisation the Zapatista Movement in Chiapas Region of Mexico</li> <li>• Sparked by adoption of the NAFTA<sup>17</sup> (1994) which would jeopardise Chiapas agricultural development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armed uprising (Jan 1 1994)</li> <li>• International media coverage of uprising, tendency to homogenise Zapatistas as “armed guerrillas only interested in state power”.</li> <li>• Internet-sympathiser coverage gained international attention and support leading to recognition by the Mexican Government and subsequent negotiations</li> <li>• Chiapas Media Project/Promedios founded in 1998 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-film productions for the global market focussing on collective projects such as organic agricultural development, coffee production and education</li> <li>-local Mayan language productions mainly covering cultural, religious and community events for the purpose of education and community cohesion<sup>18</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Papua: Free Papua Movement (<i>Organisasi Papua Merdeka</i> [OPM]) 1964-5</li> <li>• Self-determination movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavily regulated freedom of press (ranked 138/180 in Freedom of Press index)</li> <li>• Pro-OPM coverage within Indonesia has resulted in intimidation, imprisonment and death of those few journalists brave enough to cover the situation</li> <li>• Global campaigns led by various NGOs disperse information about ongoing human rights violations in West Papua<sup>19</sup></li> <li>• Free West Papua website (run out of the UK) is a platform of information ranging from NGO reports to films, music and print-ready campaign materials</li> </ul>

Whilst important to understand the history and strengths of Indigenous media, this research report will examine the role of alternative media as a whole unit, encompassing both Indigenous and non-indigenous media sources, so as not to contribute to the binary of Indigenous and non-indigenous and subsequently risk othering Indigenous Australian livelihoods once again. Alternative media, therefore, is conceptualised based upon Atton’s review of definitions and is media that is not profit driven, not exclusively politically aligned and challenges hegemony (2002). The following section begins to address research sub-question 1.1: How is Indigenous development represented by media in Australia?

<sup>17</sup> NAFTA: The North American Fair Trade Agreement saw removal of trade tariffs and barriers between Mexico, the United States and Canada. This led to direct competition between *campesinos* (peasants) and large agri-business. In Chiapas, an entire culture of farming felt under threat.

<sup>18</sup> Atton, 2003; Chiapas Media Project, n.d; Halkin, 2008; Rich, 1997; Trescott, 2015

<sup>19</sup> Blades, 2014; Kirksey and Roemajauw, 2002; Leadbeater, 2008; Gorlinski, 2014; RSF, 2015a; RSF, 2015b



## 3.2. REPRESENTATIONS IN MEDIA

An Australian survey, *the Reconciliation Barometer Research Project*, found that 35 percent of non-Indigenous respondents were reliant on the media as their sole information source for Indigenous events, cultures and issues (Reconciliation Australia, 2012). Therefore, understanding how media represents Indigenous issues is essential. Despite the number of respondents reliant on media sources of information, just “18% of general community respondents agree that the media presents a balanced view of Indigenous Australia, with 43% disagreeing” (Reconciliation Australia, 2012: 12). These findings are confirmed in research regarding how the mainstream media represents Indigenous issues, which found evidence of “strong elements of stereotyping, simplification and bias” in the way those issues were framed (Budarick, 2011; Cunneen, 2008). Not only do media representations perpetuate Indigenous stereotypes, multi-disciplinary research by McCallum et al. concludes that “the way Indigenous issues are portrayed in mainstream news media does impact on the way Indigenous affairs policies are developed, communicated and implemented” (McCallum et al., 2012: vii). Conversely there is also evidence that alternative media sources provide a platform of contestation and a voice of agency and empowerment for those otherwise marginalised and othered (Proudfoot and Habibis, 2013; Budarick, 2011; Retzlaff, 2006). The following section will use one political event to show how the media can problematise Indigenous livelihoods and the impact these discourses may have.

### 3.2.1. Problematising Indigenous development

Problematisation is the process in which a particular event or issue is shaped and framed to create a new way in which it is understood by outsiders. This process creates a new conceptualisation or understanding of the issue and the issue takes on the form of a *problem*, usually followed with a proposed solution (Baachi, 2012; Cunneen, 2008). Through the choice of words used to define and describe an issue, there is an inherent assumption of power and a degree of silencing. “The language we use ... reflects power: who has the power to define the problem in a particular way, who is silenced by a particular representation” (Cunneen, 2008: 2). In Australian mainstream media “journalists [take] a central role in both constructing and representing Indigenous people

and issues as problems to be solved” (McCallum, 2012b: 3) simultaneously disempowering Indigenous voices whilst reflecting colonial hegemony.

An example of problematisation in mainstream media is the way in which Indigenous development was represented in the lead up to implementation of a radical policy, the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act*, in 2007<sup>20</sup> (see Figure 4 for a brief overview of the Act). The Intervention relied upon acceptance that Aboriginal communities were rife with child abuse and neglect and implementation was so racially targeted that the Federal Government had to suspend its own *Racial Discrimination Act* (1975) (AHRC, 2007; AHRC, 2011). The Intervention is discussed in more detail below in Figure 4. The way Indigenous development was portrayed by media in the lead up to implementation of the Intervention has been heavily researched<sup>21</sup> and there is wide acceptance by researchers that the media played a huge part in the way the racist policy was established and accepted. I will briefly summarise just a few of these papers to demonstrate not only the way that issues can be problematised, but the impact that these discursive events can have.

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<sup>20</sup> The *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act* (2007); henceforth referred to by its common abbreviation, the Intervention

<sup>21</sup> for example Altman and Hinkson, 2010; Altman and Russell, 2012; Atkinson, Taylor and Walter, 2010; Dodson, 2007; Fawcett and Hanlon, 2009; Hunter, 2007; Macoun, 2011; McCallum, 2013; Morphy and Morphy, 2008; Morphy and Morphy, 2013; Proudfoot and Habibis, 2012; Sorenson, Fowler, Nash and Bacon, 2014

Figure 4: The 2007 Intervention

**Trigger:** During 2006 mainstream media current affairs television show *Lateline* aired a series of interviews, the key theme of which was Aboriginal child abuse in the Northern Territory. Initially, Alice Springs Crown Prosecutor Annette King was interviewed about the incidence of unreported child abuse within Aboriginal communities. During the thirty minute interview, King alluded to five cases of child abuse in Aboriginal communities in the NT (Jones, 2006a) sparking a damming period of news sensationalism, homogenisation and problematisation. The night after King's interview, Mal Brough, Federal Minister of Indigenous Affairs, stated on *Lateline* that "everybody in those communities knows who runs the paedophile rings. They know who brings in the petrol and they know who sells the ganja" (Brough speaking on ABC *Lateline*, May 16th 2006). Brough had no grounding for his statement that Aboriginal communities in the NT were operating a paedophile ring and to date there has been no evidence of such an organisation existing.

One month after Brough's appearance, *Lateline* once again broached the topic of Aboriginal child abuse, but this episode took a different approach. When faced with a lack of evidence regarding the paedophile rings, *Lateline* subsequently conspired with Brough to fabricate eye-witness testimony to support the claims (Graham, 2010). Smith interviewed anonymous Aboriginal Youth Health Worker (AYHW) for an episode of *Lateline*. Almost four years after his interview, the "anonymous AYHW" was uncovered to be Gregory Andrews, Assistant Secretary to Mal Brough, Minister of Indigenous Affairs. Andrews' statements during the 2006 *Lateline* interview were irrefutably disproven and *Lateline* investigated by MediaWatch for unethical journalism. No charges were laid against the news producers and Andrews was made to deliver a public apology for the deceitful interview (Graham, 2010).

**The Act:** Regardless of the lack of evidence supporting the claims by Brough and Andrews, the Federal government initiated the Intervention the following year (2007) citing Aboriginal child welfare as the major catalyst for the racist policy. There was no consultation or participation from the NT Government, nor residents of the affected communities (AHRC, 2007; AHRC, 2011). Despite the rationale for the Intervention being cited as child protection, this "was not conducted by the Territory's statutory child protection authority" (Arney, McGuinness and Robinson, 2009: 43). Rather, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) commenced Operation OUTREACH on the 27th June, 2007 at a cost of \$15.5 million.

**Key points:** Implementation of the Intervention first required suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and overrode the *Northern Territory (Self Government) Act 1978* (AHRC, 2007; AHRC, 2011)

The Intervention only applied to 73 prescribed Aboriginal communities in the NT, measures were based solely on race (AI, 2010)

Policy components include alcohol restrictions, compulsory income management, enforced school attendance, increased policing, governance reforms and the appointment of community managers, changes to the *Native Title Act 1993* and removal of the permit system for gaining access to Aboriginal land (Altman and Russell, 2012)

There was no evaluative framework for the Act (AI, 2010) and it is still in effect to date under the revised title of the *Stronger Futures Act* (2012)

The UN has publicly criticised the Government's actions and called for urgent review of the Act to ensure it meet obligations under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (UN, 2009abc)

### **3.2.2. The impact of problematisation: an example**

Research by Proudfoot and Habibis (2013) reviewed media coverage of Indigenous development in the year leading up to implementation of the Intervention (see Figure 4 for more detail about media coverage during this time). They found that the “mainstream media provided a stereotyped, negative and over-simplistic portrayal of Aboriginal communities and portrayed the problems they faced as a threat to social order” (Proudfoot and Habibis, 2013: 3). This is reflected in work by McCallum in which over 1000 news stories were analysed in the “critical media moment”<sup>22</sup> leading up to the Intervention (2013: 337). McCallum concluded that mainstream media coverage oversimplified Indigenous development needs, problematised the issues within individual frames of blame and rapidly shifted discourses from that of self-determination to paternalism (2013). In the year prior to the Intervention, Former Minister of Health Tony Abbott made this statement:

A "new paternalism" to replace Aboriginal self-determination is needed to lift communities out of the dysfunction, disease and hopelessness that afflicts them.  
(Minister of Health Tony Abbott, as cited in Metherell and Peatling, 2006)

Whilst there is no argument about the ongoing need to address Indigenous development throughout Australia, the media focussed on paternalism as the solution (Altman and Hinkson, 2010; McCallum, 2013; Proudfoot and Habibis, 2012; Reid, 2012). In the critical media moment leading up to implementation of the Intervention, media problematised Aboriginal communities in the NT as being rife with social dysfunction (Altman and Hinkson, 2010). As a consequence, the Intervention was hastily developed and implemented to address the discursively constructed emergency. Aboriginal voices were, for the most, silenced during this media frenzy. However, there was some evidence of contestation through alternative media sources.

### **3.2.3. Contesting the problem**

Alternative media provides an alternate discourse for Indigenous affairs, challenging hegemonic discourses and removing the use of stereotypes from the standard

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<sup>22</sup> Media coverage of Indigenous issues in the 12 months prior to implementation of the Intervention

repertoire evident in mainstream media. By removing stereotypes alternative media can “help to break down prejudices for non-Indigenous audiences” (Meadows, 2012: 24). Within Proudfoot and Habibis’ (2013) critical analysis of media in the lead up to the Intervention, they identified a large presence of contesting discourses from alternative media. In part, these discourses highlighted the binary of voiceless Aboriginals and privileged whites, “an *us* and *them* dichotomy” (ibid: 13). Proudfoot and Habibis go on to discuss the impact of the binaries through words such as “they”, “their” and “them” in creating a white privileged other “suggesting that [the white privileged] dialogical category has never been and would never be, subjected to such intrusive, race-specific and hastily implemented legislation” (2013: 13). The result of this discursive dichotomy is the sense of a second-class citizenship, in which Indigenous Australians are grouped together as the homogenous *other*.

### 3.2.4. Othering and moral panic

Othering, as defined by Eyben, is “the process whereby a dominant group defines into existence a subordinate group” (2007: 40). Eyben draws on the practice of aid agencies classifying people by labels as an example of othering, specifically the application of labels as defined by those who do not identify with that label. For example, earlier I discussed Escobar’s (2012) critique of the discursive representations of the 1960s African famine in which an entire continent was homogenised under one label<sup>23</sup>. Here, a dominant group creates and defines an impoverished Africa. Othering can create or reproduce marginalisation of the “subordinate” or vulnerable group (Langton, 2010). The alternative, *normalising*, also has its problems in that specific needs and unique considerations of a minority population may not be recognised (Mickler, 1998). This reflects criticism of Escobar’s early work, in which alternative solutions to poverty were not proposed.

Not only can othering create the sense of a subordinate group, but once the *other* had been widely accepted by the dominate group, it becomes very easy to incite moral panic. Moral panic is directly related to mass media and a requisite of moral panic is that there is a perceived or actual threat to societal norms and values, which is then transmitted by the media (Thompson, 2015). A current example of moral panic is the way in which media has presented global terrorism as a predominantly Muslim threaat since

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<sup>23</sup> Albeit a highly appropriate label at that time for some regions such as Biafra

the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Rothe and Muzzatti, 2004). In Australia there is evidence of moral panic surrounding the arrival and processing of asylum seekers. Martin describes the moral panic as a consequence of the “Muslim-terrorist-refugee ... transnational folk devil” (Martin, 2015: 304). Cohen (1973) pioneered the discussion and debate of moral panic, defined as a period of time in which a:

...condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized [*sic*] and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people... (Cohen, 1973 in Hunt, 1997: 630)

Strengthening the impact of the moral panic is the removal and disconnect of one population from another. In the case of Indigenous development in Australia, there is a perceived cultural and geographical disconnect between the dominant group and the *othered*. This disengages the dominant group from the consequences of the negative and problematising discursive portrayal of these people (Altman and Hinkson, 2010). Cohen goes on to say that

...sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten... at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself. (Cohen, 1973 in Hunt, 1997: 631)

Moral panic is evident in the way mainstream media represents Indigenous issues. This has been used to insight panic and rationalise the implementation of racist and paternalistic political policies such as the Intervention (2007). Moral panic and problematisation can be traced back to colonisation and the declaration of *Terra Nullius* (see Chapter 1.5), in which lack of a “structured society” rationalised the beginning of paternalist attempts at assimilation (Cunneen, 2008; Tatz, 1999). It can be concluded that the way in which media has represented Indigenous issues as a problem to be fixed, rife with social dysfunction, continues to have long lasting implications in the Australian socio-political sphere.

### 3.3. CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Alternative media productions are one medium of hopeful post-development, in which messages of agency and empowerment may be disseminated (McGregor, 2009). Within Proudfoot and Habibis' critical analyses of media in the lead up to the Intervention, they identified a significant space for Indigenous media in contesting problematising and discriminatory representations evident in mainstream media. "Including Indigenous media in analysis of discourse provides an opportunity to reposition the normativity of mainstream representations of Indigeneity and give voice to Aboriginal constructions of Aboriginal issues" (Proudfoot and Habibis, 20012: 4).

Whilst important to understand the history and strengths of Indigenous media, this research report will examine the role of alternative media as a whole unit, encompassing both Indigenous and non-indigenous media sources, so as not to contribute to the binary of Indigenous and non-indigenous that has proven to *other* and discriminate Indigenous Australians. The following chapter will provide detail of the methodology adopted for this research report. To conclude this chapter, Kenix summaries the importance of media and why critical engagement is so essential:

The media re-present our politics, our social institutions, our governments and ourselves. A plurality of perspectives has been said to be central in developing an engaged, mutual understanding of the differences and similarities that exist between us as human beings. Media construct our reality and help to shape who we are or even who we wish to become. (Kenix, 2011: 1)

## **Chapter 4: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach chosen to answer the research question, including design appropriateness. As described in Chapter 1, the aim of the research was to examine ways in which alternative media contest the construct of negative identities of Aboriginal Australians, as evidenced in discourse analyses of mainstream media in Australia. The following chapter will begin with an overview of the methodology and discussion of the main method used. The research methodology was qualitative in design with the main method being critical discourse analysis. This is a qualitative methodology and allows for a deep examination and interpretation of complex social context and comprehensive exploration and discussion of a social phenomenon (Denzin, 2009; O'Leary, 2004; Snape and Spencer, 2013:5).

### **4.1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND POST-DEVELOPMENT**

This desk-based study undertook a review of the literature including academic, media and policy sources and uses a discourse analysis to identify and understand the relationship between agency and empowerment and media. As discussed within the literature review, one aspect of post-development is the concern for embedded power within discourses of development. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a branch of discourse studies that allows for examination of that embedded power through deconstruction of text. It is heterogeneous in design, drawing from a range of disciplines such as development studies, linguistics and anthropology (Fairclough, 2011; van Dijk, 2001; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Wodak and Meyer provide a succinct description of the key features of CDA:

...the defining features of CDA are its concern with power as a central condition in social life and its efforts to develop a theory of language that incorporates this as a major premise. Closely attended to are not only the notion of struggles for power and control, but also the intertextuality and recontextualization [sic]



of competing discourses in various public spaces and genres.

(Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 10)

CDA, therefore, was selected as an appropriate method for this research as it allows for gaining a clearer understanding of the relationship between language, power and social and cultural developments between communities and wider society (Cotter, 2001: 418; Jørgensen and Phillip, 2002:60).

During my literature review I highlighted the potential impacts that media can have on indigenous development. By then bringing together arguments from post-development, alternative development and indigenous development it became clear that discourse plays a crucial role in development thinking and practice. To examine the dominant themes and presentations of Indigenous affairs evident in alternative media I have chosen to conduct analysis of media coverage of the proposal to remove municipal services from Aboriginal communities in Western Australia (O'Connor, 2015).

## **4.2. CASE STUDY FOR ANALYSIS**

From November 2014 to August 2015, both alternative and mainstream media covered the proposal to remove municipal services from remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia (WA). First announced by Premier Colin Barnett in November 2014, this proposal will effectively deem some Indigenous communities and homelands uninhabitable due to the cessation of essential services provision, for example clean water, sanitation and power<sup>24</sup>. In early 2015, the ABC received a leaked Federal Government document which categorised Aboriginal communities in WA into groups based on economic viability (O'Connor, 2015; see Appendix A). It was at this time that it became clear that those communities classified as “unsustainable” would lose municipal funding for essential services. The announcement by Premier Colin Barnett has caused

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<sup>24</sup> This proposal came just months before the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015). Of particular relevance to the Barnett proposal are the SDGs to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Goal 6) and to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (Goal 7). Not only is progress towards these goals going to be reversed by the Barnett proposal, the following chapters will highlight how Indigenous wellbeing is so closely linked with homelands. By stripping people of access to basic human needs in these communities, Australia can expect to see growing inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, in stark contrast with SDG Goal 10 (to reduce inequality within and among countries) (UN, 2015b).

distress, uncertainty and grief in communities that have been relegated to a mere code in a Government document and great sensitivity is needed as this event continues to unfold.

Due to the significance of this proposal for Indigenous development and the vast media attention it has received, it was selected for the purpose of identifying agentic contestation through alternative media. This “event” allows for a snapshot of indisputable discrimination against Indigenous Australians in a time when media is readily distributed online<sup>25</sup> and easily accessible for analysis. The method of CDA will now be presented.

### 4.3. METHOD FOR ANALYSIS

I have chosen to replicate the CDA method of Aldrich et al. (2007) as their research<sup>26</sup> involved application of the method to an extensive sample of documents. Importantly, Aldrich et al.’s findings are in keeping with conclusions made through review of a wide range of literature, for example Proudfoot and Habibis (2013) and appear valid. The authors of Advance Australia Fair investigated the relationship between Australian politicians’ public communication of beliefs and subsequent health policy and health outcomes. They did this by analysing public statements made by politicians directly involved in the national health care policy and provision for Indigenous Australians. Aldrich et al. identified articles for analysis using the Parliament of Australia archives, which included official press releases, speeches and statements (2007: 127). The authors conducted critical discourse analysis of 81 documents spanning from 1972 to 2001 and were able to identify four dominant discourses summarised here:

- i. Agency (capacity and competence) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities to act to improve community and individual health status
- ii. Who controlled and who was responsible for health improvement
- iii. The causes of and solutions to the “problem” of ill-health
- iv. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples were discursively *othered* from most Australians

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<sup>25</sup> The proposal will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5

<sup>26</sup> Advance Australia Fair: Social democratic and conservative politicians' discourses concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their health 1972-2001

The following section will discuss the method for the current research in more detail, commencing with how I identified the articles for analysis.

### **4.3.1. Identifying articles for analysis**

The period for analysis was determined by reviewing the current proposal to close Aboriginal communities in WA (O'Connor, 2015). Articles were selected based on who published them, the main topic of the article and match with specific key words. Articles were accessed using online sources only, excluding television and radio. This was due to the desk-based nature of the current research.

To specifically identify relevant articles, the following criteria were established. Archives were scanned from November 2014 to August 2015 for key words: community closures, Western Australia; Aborigines\*, Australia\*. To be eligible for analysis, preference was given to articles that specifically addressed issues of indigenous development within the allotted period of time. In the case of agentive contestation through alternative media, human rights, equality and protest were also added to archival search terms of reference.

### **4.3.2. The critical discourse analysis process**

Research methodology by Aldrich et al. (2007) were drawn from to establish a process of CDA for the selected articles. They describe their process as combining two approaches to discourse analysis. The first is to examine the words, sentence structure and content, followed by a broader examination of the actors involved and the context of the article in question (2007: 127). The current CDA will replicate this method. The following is a direct quotation regarding the process followed by Aldrich et al.:

Sample questions for discourse analysis.

- i. What: What is being discussed? What idea is the topic or sentence constructing? What words (especially nouns, adjectives, verbs and pronouns) are used? Are any specific belief statements made? How are devices of language such as metaphor used?
- ii. Who, when and where: who are the participants? From what perspective do they participate? What is the setting and context of the discursive event?

- iii. How: How are sentences structured? Is a subject active or passive? What format is used for the communication? Is the form and format specific to an elite use or purpose or group?  
(Aldrich et al.,2007: 127)

Aldrich et al.'s sample questions for discourse analysis were for the most part replicated. However, the third question regarding the "how" was omitted due to the limited scope available within this research report. Aldrich et al.'s research analysed public statements and therefore a range of mediums through which those statements were published. As all articles for the current research were sourced from news publications, the format of each was relatively consistent. Where significant deviations were identified, this was addressed and discussed. Adapted from Aldrich et al.'s method, the current CDA is comprised of two stages: key themes (what) and participation (who) which will now be defined.

### **4.3.3. What is being discussed: key themes**

The first stage of analysis was to identify the central theme of the article. Due to the selection criteria for the articles, all were positioned around the proposal to close Aboriginal communities in WA. However, key word identification and headline analysis allowed me to construct additional themes and topics under the broader umbrella of the proposal. This was done by examining each article for its introductory statements and the subsequent topic that lead from it. The concluding statements of the article were examined as these tended to highlight the key topic and position of the author very clearly. Through application of this process to 24 articles, three recurring themes were identified and will be discussed in full in Chapter five.

### **4.3.4. Who is participating in the discursive event?**

The second stage of article analysis involved identification of participants (see Figure 5) and is especially important when considering agency. Drawing on Martin's types of information sources (2003), participants were identified as primary or secondary sources. Primary sources are those who directly contributed to the content. This includes participants who were quoted or interviewed in direct relation to the article being analysed. Secondary sources were those which were drawn from other sources, government press releases for example. Other secondary sources include other news stories, for example the current affairs show Four Corners coverage of community

closures. This secondary source was critically analysed by journalist Amy McQuire of New Matilda. The purpose of her analysis was to highlight the “fishbowl journalism<sup>27</sup>” and misrepresentation of communities as problematic wastelands (McQuire, 2015f). This criticism was iterated throughout alternative media and drew upon secondary sources from the original airing of the current affairs show. Another type of source is indirect quoting or paraphrasing rather than direct quotations. This practice subsumes the voice of the source and to a degree, silences that voice (Martin, 2003: 202).

Figure 5: Summary of participant analysis and sub-categories

Who is mentioned in the article?	These are all of the participants.
Who directly contributes to the article?	These are the primary sources.
Who is quoted from another source?	These are the secondary sources
Who is spoken of behalf of?	These are subsumed participants.

## 4.4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As this research is desk-based and uses document analysis as the method of data collection and analysis, ethics approval was not required. However it was vital for me to understand specific ethical and cultural procedures and requirements, in part to ensure my research conclusions do not themselves disempower those at the centre of my research. I am reflective of my position as a non-Indigenous researcher and have strived to highlight the power of the subaltern through alternative media so as not to perpetuate the very power structures that I am challenging. The Aboriginal Research Practitioners’ Network (ARPN) developed a reference tool ‘Doing Research the Bininj Way’ (2014), in which they address best practice principles for research involving Aboriginal populations. These are to *recognise*, *respect* and *respond*. In addition to this reference tool the ARPN Dilly Bag (Sithole, 2012) is a comprehensive field guide for participatory research in Indigenous communities. Due to the nature of my research, I was limited in my ability to fully achieve all aspects of the Bininj Way. I do however acknowledge the

<sup>27</sup> Amy McQuire describes fishbowl journalism: “Australian media arrive to film devastating pictures of the Aboriginal problem, feel outraged, dismayed and shocked by it and then a couple of months later do basically the same story from another remote corner of the country” (2015f).

importance of these methodological considerations and am sensitive to the gravity of the issues surrounding my research project case study.

## **4.5. CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS**

Through application of the method detailed above I aimed to identify the extent to which alternative media promotes or disseminates messages of agency and empowerment. This research allows for qualitative research findings to be discussed within the framework of post-development and overall contribute to understanding the role that alternative media plays in promoting the agency and empowerment of the selected population. Discourse analysis surrounding the selected case study, the proposal to close WA communities, will begin in Chapter five with a review of the closures announcement from Premier Colin Barnett and supporting statements from Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott. From there I will detail my research findings regarding key themes and participants.

## Chapter 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

In this chapter media coverage of the proposal that Aboriginal communities in Western Australia (WA) are to lose municipal services will be analysed. Specifically, articles will be examined for the purpose of identifying participants and key themes. This event has gained media coverage in both the mainstream and alternative streams of production in Australia and the following chapter addresses the initial announcement followed by exploration of the space for alternative media during this time.

### 5.1. THE PRIORITY INVESTMENT COMMUNITIES REPORT

In March 2015, there was a spike in news coverage of the proposed community closures in WA due to the leaking of a Federal Government report to the press<sup>28</sup>. The leaked document provides indisputable evidence that the Government had graded remote Aboriginal communities in WA based on their economic viability and sustainability. The *Priority Investment Communities Report* (henceforth known as the PIC Report), dated 2010, divided 287 remote communities between four categories of sustainability (see Appendix A for a copy of the report and Table 6 for a summary of the category descriptions). Methodology and criteria used to develop the PIC Report have not been disclosed by the Government, however it is irrefutable that assessment and categorisation was limited to Aboriginal-founded communities only. One case of clear racial discrimination is the categorisation of Looma and the omission of Camballin from the PIC Report.

#### 5.1.1. A Great Western (Australia) Standoff: Looma against Camballin

One community subject to categorisation is Looma, located approximately 120km inland from Derby in far north WA. Looma was established during Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's term which saw reinstatement of land rights for Indigenous peoples<sup>29</sup>. According to the most recent ABS data, Looma has a population of 374

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<sup>28</sup> First covered by O'Connor of the ABC on 25 March 2015

<sup>29</sup> In 1975, Whitlam implemented the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* (1976) (refer to Chapter 1 for more detail).

(2013b). The future of this community is now uncertain as it receives a category rating of B in the PIC Report (see Table 6). Camballin, in contrast, is located a mere 10km from Looma (Google Maps, 2015b). Also founded in the early 1970s, this community differs from Looma in little more than its origins. The establishment of Camballin was funded by the WA Government to support a *Northern Developments Pty. Ltd* rice production scheme (Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation [WNAC], n.d). On review of census data of Looma and Camballin there are very few differences between the communities. Both have permanent populations of less than 600, household income is marginally higher in Camballin and both communities are populated predominantly by Aboriginal people (ABS, 2013ab). The only clear difference between these communities is that Looma was founded through Indigenous land rights processes and Camballin was founded by the Government as part of a now defunct agricultural development scheme. The residents of Looma are now at risk of being forcibly removed from their community solely due to the process by which their land was founded.

Table 6: Summary of the Priority Investment Communities Report		
Category title	Category description	Number of communities
<i>Town based communities</i>	Access to services in adjacent towns; “future investment should facilitate the integration of the community into the Town Planning Scheme...”	36
<i>Category A</i>	“...preconditions for sustainable development exist... new investment is very likely to further facilitate and support long term Closing the Gap outcomes in these and their related communities.”	24
<i>Category B</i>	“...many preconditions for growth exist... new investment in these communities would support communities in Category A in providing services to other communities in the cluster.”	35
<i>Category C</i>	“Communities where there are constraints to sustainable development and opportunities for future growth are limited. Investments will be limited to sustaining existing assets and services.”	192
<i>Total number of communities assessed</i>		<b>287</b>
<b>Source:</b> Priority Investment Communities Report <sup>30</sup> (2010) in O’Connor, 2015		

Whilst the case of Looma and Camballin gives a clear example of discrimination between a town with Aboriginal roots and a town established by the Government, the

<sup>30</sup> see Appendix A for more detail



explanations and rationale from Premier Colin Barnett have not been so clear. In the next section I will give a synopsis of the Premier's changing rhetoric and rationale for the proposal.

### **5.1.2. Budget cuts, lifestyle choices and neglect**

At the time of its inception, the PIC Report (2010) described those communities in Category C as having constraints for future development and therefore were to receive support for existing assets and services only. In other words, those 192 communities would receive funding for established services and not for development of new services. However, it now appears that the PIC Report is being used to determine which communities are to have their services ceased entirely, Premier Colin Barnett initially citing Federal budget cuts as the reason (Government of WA, 2015).

Premier Colin Barnett's rhetoric around community closures has ranged from blaming Federal funding cuts to unsubstantiated claims of widespread child abuse and violence occurring in the communities. In his March 2015 media statement, Barnett announced major reforms for the purpose of improving health, education and job prospects (Government of WA, 2015). The first line of the statement highlights safety of children as a priority, with no further information about what this entails. The statement dedicates the following five lines of text to economic justification of the reforms, claiming that \$58 million has gone into services for 1,410 people. Child safety briefly enters the rhetoric again, before proposing identification of communities in which future investment will most likely bring positive outcomes. Barnett then states that the WA government is prepared to "spend more on improving opportunities for Aboriginal communities" (Government of WA, 2015) contradicting other statements in which he cites Federal budget cuts as the rationale for community closures.

Award-winning journalist<sup>31</sup> John Pilger followed the trail of rationale provided by Premier Barnett, beginning with the claim that "reforms" were a direct consequence of Federal budget cuts. In October 2014 Barnett stated that the WA government could not afford the "\$90 million budget for basic municipal services to 282 homelands: water, power, sanitation, schools, road maintenance, rubbish collection" (cited in Pilger, 2015: para 16). In March 2015, following months of negative response and protest, Barnett

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<sup>31</sup> The youngest person to win *Journalist of the Year* and to win it twice (1967 and 1979), other awards include the *UN Media Peace Prize* and *Best Documentary* for *The War on Democracy* (John Pilger biography, 2010-2015).

shifted his rhetoric to one of child neglect and abuse associated with remote living. This claim was proven to be completely unsubstantiated, at one stage even misinterpreting (or misrepresenting) 15 year old research which actually showed poverty to be the most significant contributing factor to child neglect. More recent research by United Nations Special Rapporteur James Anaya asserts that those Indigenous peoples that wish to and are able to reside on their traditional homelands have better quality of life and support structures:

Homelands are widely understood to have lower levels of social problems, such as domestic violence and substance abuse, than more populated communities. According to reports, the health of Indigenous people living on homelands is significantly better than of those living in larger communities. Homelands are also used effectively as part of substance abuse and other programmes for at-risk Aboriginal youth living in more populated or urban centres.  
(Anaya, 2010: 18)

Despite evidence that Barnett was misinformed in his statement regarding child abuse, reaction to the allegations polarised the general public, once again inciting a sense of moral panic in those distant from the allegations. Throughout the period of the announcement, Barnett consistently failed to engage with communities he was discussing. His solutions to development challenges in remote communities were highly paternalistic and punitive. Barnett frequently referred to over 200 communities as if they are one group of people who are not capable of managing their own lives. Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott also followed this discursive pathway.

Two weeks prior to leaking of the PIC Report Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott visited Kalgoorlie-Boulder, 600km east of Perth. During his visit he was interviewed by ABC reporter Kirstyn March. When asked about the proposal to close remote Aboriginal communities, Abbott made his position clear:

It's not the job of the taxpayer to subsidise lifestyle choices.  
It's the job of the taxpayer to provide reasonable services  
in a reasonable way... It is the responsibility of every  
Australian parent to send his or her children to school –

Indigenous people no less than everyone else. It's the responsibility of every Australian adult to look for work if you are capable of work and, yes, while you are looking for work, the government will pay you unemployment benefits, but what we can't do is endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have. (Abbott in March, 2015)

The introductory sentence of the quote personalises the statement by including the “taxpayer” as a key player in the issue and attempts to divide taxpayers and remote community residents giving the impression that those residents are not taxpayers. It then goes on to identify Australian parents as a sub-group and goes on to separate Indigenous parents into a further sub-group. The nouns *job*, *responsibility* and *participation* are embedded throughout the statement and imply that Indigenous parents are not fulfilling their “responsibility ... to send his or her children to school”. The quote is in response to questions about community closures, however Abbott then segues into unemployment benefits. His language again suggests that residents of remote communities are not looking for work and are recipients of Government welfare. The most impacting component of Abbott's statement is the frequent use of “lifestyle choices” to describe the relationship between the land and those living remotely. Abbott's statement leads the “taxpayer” to understand those living remotely chose this location due to a preference for the lifestyle that accompanies it, demonstrating a complete disconnect with and disrespect for Indigenous cultures.

Widespread outrage rose in response to Abbott's comment, including public statements from his two closest advisors for Indigenous affairs. Walter Mundine, Chair of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council stated in an interview:

It is not about a lifestyle, it is not like retiring and moving for a sea change, it is about thousands of years' connection, their religious beliefs and the essence of who they are. (Mundine cited in Bourke, 2015)

Interestingly, this is not the first time “lifestyle choices” has entered the political discourse arena. In 2002, Employment Services Minister of the time Mal Brough attempted to disrupt welfare dependence in Australia, stating that

if these so-called cruisers think the Howard Government is going to allow them to take advantage of the generosity of the Australian taxpayer to fund their lifestyle choice, they have another thing coming". (Brough, 2002 cited in Robinson, 2010: 63)

"Lifestyle choices" in this instance was applied to people who receive unemployment welfare across Australia. Abbott now adopts the same language and transfers it to the context of remote community living or "lifestyles".

Indigenous livelihoods in WA are currently shadowed by conflicting and homogenising language that attempts to portray remote Indigenous communities as problematic, economically unviable, unsafe for children, poorly populated, a lifestyle choice so undeserving of services, most of which are a human right. Of key concern here is the potential distress and uncertainty this is causing residents of the communities. In keeping with the concepts of agency and empowerment, I will now examine the discursive representations evident within alternative media at this tenuous time in Indigenous development, beginning with a description of the media sources from which I obtained the articles for analysis.

## **5.2. ARTICLE SOURCES**

24 articles were identified and analysed following the methodology set out in Chapter 4 (see Appendix B for a full reference of each article). Figure 8 shows each news source identified and the number of articles yielded from that source. Following is a brief description of the news sources.

Land Rights News was established in 1976 and is jointly owned by the Northern and Central Land Councils based in the NT (Northern Land Council, n.d). Originally the Land Councils produced one quarterly paper but due to the diversity and expanse of the region they now produce a Central Edition and Northern Edition, each publishing three to four free online and print papers per year. The Koori Mail was established in 1991 and has a readership of 100,000 per fortnightly publication. The Koori Mail is jointly owned by five Aboriginal organisations, is fully self-funded and all profits are returned to Indigenous Australians (Koori Mail, 2015). The National Indigenous Times (NIT) is a

relatively young news producer, first publishing in 2002. The NIT is co-owned by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, but is staffed predominantly by Indigenous journalists. The NIT relies on donations and subscription fees to fund its weekly national paper (NIT, n.d). The remaining thirteen articles were sourced from New Matilda, The Stringer and Crikey. All three are fully online news sources and pride themselves on being independent from media corporations and Government funding. New Matilda was founded in 2004, Crikey in 2000 and The Stringer is the newest news source founded just two years ago in 2013 (Crikey, 2010-2015; New Matilda, n.d; The Stringer, 2015). Following identification of the articles, I was able to identify three themes which will now be discussed.

Figure 7: A breakdown of article sources	
News Source	Number of articles
Crikey	3
First Nations Telegraph	<i>nil</i>
Koori Mail	8
Land Rights News: Central Edition	1
Land Rights News: Northern Edition	1
National Indigenous Times	1
New Matilda	8
The Stringer	2
Treaty Republic	<i>not currently publishing</i>
Total	24

### 5.3. DISCOURSE in ALTERNATIVE MEDIA: Themes

Twenty four news articles were analysed for their key themes and topics. All articles were overarched by the presupposition that the proposal to close down communities will not benefit Indigenous Australians and this is the dominant theme. Predominantly, the articles began with an introduction to the dominant theme. This was done by recapitulating the statements by Premier Colin Barnett or by citing another source of information in which the proposal was covered. From there it became clear that articles branched off into different approaches to addressing the issues, however all articles analysed were clearly contesting the proposal. No articles analysed were in

support of the community closures. Through my analysis of the selected articles I was able to identify three additional themes:

1. Contestation of problematising and inconsistent narratives that rationalise proposal
2. Indigenous development, knowledge and history
3. Rallies and protests

Of the 24 articles retrieved and analysed, five were framed by *contestation of problematising and inconsistent narratives that rationalise proposal*, fifteen by *Indigenous knowledge, history and culture* and four by *rallies and protests*. These themes will now be independently defined and discussed.

### **5.3.1. Contestation of problematising and inconsistent narratives that rationalise proposal**

#### *Defining Characteristics*

These articles presented and critiqued statements made by Government officials, the most common being Premier Colin Barnett's rationale for the proposal. These articles presented statements made by politicians and either contested them through fact-checking or identified inconsistencies in the content of the statement. Articles that were framed around language used by politicians were heavily contesting the messages being disseminated and tended to draw upon experiences from previous paternalistic Government action.

#### *Findings*

These articles trace the rationale of Premier Barnett's proposal. Initially Barnett blamed Federal budget cuts for the proposed closures, but when the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) presented with the WA Government with an appropriate alternative to this alleged funding shortfall, Barnett's rationale shifted to employment opportunities, small population numbers and finally to child neglect. Amy McQuire of New Matilda challenges this citation of child abuse in her article, *Barnett plays 'abuse card' to defend closure of remote West Australian Communities* (2015b). McQuire cites an ABC interview with WA's Labor shadow Aboriginal affairs spokesperson Ben Wyatt to support her message of conflicting and ad hoc rationale:

Not once has [Premier Colin Barnett] mentioned his concern about the children of remote Aboriginal communities until this year, now that he's trying to justify a decision to save money in the state's budget. (Wyatt, cited in McQuire, 2015b: para 37)

An aptly titled article published in the LRNC, *Buckpassing leaves hundreds in limbo*, adds high suicide rates and poor health to Barnett's repertoire of rationale. While the authors of this article do not dispute the need to address social development and health in communities, they strongly argue that shutting down homelands will only make these issues worse (LRNC, 2015). A concern raised in *Homelands under threat* is that "if the WA State Government cannot continue to service remote communities, how is it going to cope with the extra service demands put on towns because of an increased population?" (Anthony Watson, cited in Koori Mail, 2014: para 8). It becomes clear through these articles that firstly there are inconsistencies in the rationale behind the proposal and beyond that there are significant concerns that if in fact funding is the true reason, what support awaits these displaced people in the towns they are moved to.

In response to an article published by the Koori Mail in February 2015, Premier Barnett wrote a letter to the editor "to address a number of issues" (Premier Barnett, 2015: para 1). The Premier does not dispute the closures proposal and for six paragraphs explains his Government's rationale including blaming Federal funding cuts. Only in the seventh paragraph does the Premier acknowledge what has been so clearly threaded throughout alternative media news articles, that there is a need for consultation. He then dedicates the next sentence to this: "the State Government will consult and work with Aboriginal leaders, residents of remote communities and local governments" (Premier Barnett, 2015: para 8) before claiming that for the rest of summer his government will *continue* to consult widely on options, despite rejecting proposals to fund communities with other sources of revenue such as Royalties for Regions which will be discussed in the upcoming section about the theme of Indigenous development, knowledge and history.

### 5.3.2. Indigenous development, knowledge and history

#### *Defining characteristics*

These articles addressed Indigenous development in Australia by either recounting historical events that impact Indigenous wellbeing, disseminating knowledge about culture and relationships with the physical environment, or by presenting a united relationship with other (global) indigenous populations as a means of promoting solidarity. These articles are written from an Indigenous perspective and challenge statements that homogenise and problematise Indigenous Australians. Rather than challenging these discourses through direct critique of individual statements, the articles challenge macro-level discrimination and marginalisation through historical analysis and story-telling.

#### *Findings*

*Indigenous development, knowledge and history* was the most prevalent theme of all articles analysed. Between November 2014 and April 2015, the Koori Mail published six articles (from a total of eight retrieved from this source) shaped by this theme. Common threads throughout the articles are that a history of colonisation, marginalisation and racial discrimination continue to impact generations of Indigenous Australians. There is a lack of consultation with remote communities and Indigenous organisations but also a lack of Indigenous representation in both State and Federal Governments. Unique to the Koori Mail articles is the presentation of an alternative to Federal funding dependence. Royalties for Regions is a WA State Government initiative, in which a proportion of mining royalties are reinvested into regional areas of WA to aid in their development. According to the Department of Regional Development:

In the 2014-15 State Budget the Government committed a further \$1 billion each year, over the next four years, into agriculture, regional revitalisation, health, community services, education, sport, transport and tourism through Royalties for Regions. (Department of Regional Development, 2014: para 3)

It becomes evident through the article *Communities at Risk* that “Mr Barnett would not commit to using the Royalties for Regions fund to keep Aboriginal communities open unless they are deemed ‘viable’” (Koori Mail, 2015: para 1). Not only have these news



articles challenged the closures proposal, they have proposed alternatives. The first is that there is an urgent need for consultation and engagement and that secondly there is a potential funding alternative in the form of royalties from mining projects in WA. Barnett was earlier quoted as saying his Government had a \$90m shortfall for remote community funding. However, the Royalties for Regions scheme has \$1b per annum specifically for regional development. This further confirms that the proposal to close communities is racially targeted and discriminating against Aboriginal regions in regional WA.

The identification of an urgent need for consultation was not limited to the Koori Mail. Marawili and Solonec both highlight the impact of discrimination, evidenced by the use of nouns such as *suffer*, *struggle* and *shock*. They also call for a participatory and empowering approach to Indigenous development. Aboriginal leader and Prime Minister's Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council member Djambawa Marawili writes about the significant relationship between Aboriginal people and their land, in the context of a rebuttal to proposed closures (published in the LRNC). Marawili outlines the developments in Indigenous business, including an "internationally recognised Australian Indigenous arts industry" (Marawili, 2015: para 2) and asks the Government to empower people to grow these industries through provision of specific training and education. Solonec (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Manager for Amnesty International) published an opinion piece in the NIT (Dec, 2014) voicing her concerns that this proposal will see a repeat of what occurred in Oombulgurri between 2011 and 2014 (see Figure 8 for a summary). Solonec drew on AI research findings that "Aboriginal people living on ancestral lands live better lives" (Solonec, 2014: para 2) and shapes her article around the process in which the Government closed Oombulgurri, beginning with classification of the homeland as "unviable" (Solonec, 2014: para 13), the same label that is now being applied to 192 communities in WA.

Both Solonec and Marawili's articles are underpinned by a deep sense of concern that if partnership between Government and Indigenous communities is not achieved, there is a great deal at risk of being lost. "I urge all governments in Australia to open transparent discussions about the future of our communities that includes those in those communities" (Solonec, 2014: para 30). Jon Altman, Australian Professorial Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, focuses on the current development

landscape and draws upon historical events to situate a strong contestation of the proposal.

Figure 8: Testing the waters: the demolition of Oombulgurri

Oombulgurri: Aboriginal community in Western Australia, east Kimberley region, approximately 45km NE of Wyndham (Google maps, 2015a)

Quick stats: According to the ABS, during the 2011 census there were 288 permanent residents in Oombulgurri, the average age was 27 and 65% of residents were in full-time employment (above the Australian average at that time of 60%) (ABS, 2013c)

Situation: Following five youth suicides in Oombulgurri during 2007, a Coronial inquiry found that “appalling social and economic conditions, combined with high levels of alcohol and cannabis use were associated with the suicides” (NATSILMH, 2014: 7). In 2008 government-led income management was implemented in the community and alcohol restrictions were put in place (HREOC, 2008). Gradually the WA government cut off essential services, first closing the community store and health clinic, then cutting off power. Residents slowly left the community but the remaining few were forcibly evicted by the WA government in 2014. Given just two days’ notice, the residents were forced to abandon possessions beyond what they could pack into a suitcase. In late 2014, at a cost to the taxpayer of \$680,000, Oombulgurri was bulldozed and demolished. According to Amnesty International (AI) \$30 million of homes, infrastructure and buildings were demolished (AI, 2014).

Significance: The UN (2014: 3) defines forced eviction as removal “... against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection”. “Cutting off the water supply or electricity or other attempts to make it untenable for someone to remain in their home may constitute forced eviction” (ibid: 5). Forced evictions breach various articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2014).

Published in March 2015, *Homelands under the hammer, again, from the aspiring PM for indigenous policy* (Altman, 2015a) paints a clear and detailed picture of the recent history of Indigenous development. Altman shapes the article by first presenting Barnett and Abbott’s statements and follows them up with fact checking and rebuttal through historical review of policies contrasted with a lack of advancements in Indigenous development. In Altman’s second article, *Hunt for the Good Life: A Black Perspective*, he

takes a more participatory approach to contesting the proposal. Altman describes the method and aim of his article:

In February I went to Maningrida to investigate the perspectives of the Kuninjku people with whom I have worked for a long time about what constitutes ‘the good life’, whether they have it in today’s precarious world, or not; whether they have ever had ‘the good life’; and whether they thought that it is something that they might achieve, if not today, in the future? (Altman, 2015b: para 1)

It becomes apparent that the good life is one in which people are able to go to their country (homelands), get food from the land and participate in cultural activities that are not possible in town hubs.

When I’m in my camp, I can paint, I can drink tea and walk around my camp and the sun goes down. Good, happy.

In Maningrida sometimes happy, sometimes not. I only think about my country. I get sad when I think about my home out bush and I can’t get out there. (Balang, cited in Altman, 2015b: para 15)

Georgatos writes about a need to shift the lens from which we examine Indigenous development. Through use of historical review of colonisation and quantitative disparities in development indices, Georgatos adds to Altman’s work in making clear the need for a shift in how Indigenous development is understood and approached. He expands on the title of his article, *Stop examining the oppressed, instead examine the oppressor – this will do in racism & marginalisation*: “for more than a century there has been an increasing examination of the oppressed but very little examination of the oppressor” (published in *The Stringer*; Georgatos, 2015; para 2). He cites Indigenous leaders’ poignant statements that Indigenous peoples are *not to blame* for the state of affairs, Georgatos explaining that “the problem cannot be and should never be the victim” (ibid: para 4). By paying homage to both Altman and Georgatos’ work, there is a strong message that government policy does not reflect priorities or interests of the stakeholder

(the community residents) and that there is a need to shift focus from those experiencing disparities or deficits to those holding the colonial power.

Other articles within this theme are shaped around solidarity with other indigenous populations, notably Māori. Interviews with Māori leaders and activists highlight the power of colonisation in uniting people against discrimination and marginalisation. Former New Zealand parliamentarian Hone Harawira had previously protested discriminatory Australian Government policy, calling the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, at the time a “racist bastard” (McQuire, 2015d: para 2). In reference to Abbott and in keeping with the link between colonisation and the current state of affairs in Australia, Harawira states that:

The forced closure of Aboriginal communities is genocide – plain and simple – something that colonialists have been trying to do ever since their arrival, originally through the gun barrels of white settlers and now through the legislation of overwhelmingly white governments. (Harawira, cited in McQuire, 2015d; para 17).

The final article to be discussed within the theme of *Indigenous development, knowledge and history* is *Indigenous arts centre responds to closure threat* (published in Crikey; McCulloch, 2015). This article highlights the development that is occurring within communities through art and independent of the Government. The article tells of a community, Kiwirrkurra, in which award winning and internationally acclaimed artists reside. Funds from the well-established arts industry in this region have been invested into mobile renal dialysis units, buildings and infrastructure and further development of an arts centre for the region (McCulloch, 2015). According to the PIC Report Kiwirrkurra is not economically viable (refer to Table 6), giving rise to questions about the methods used to derive these category allotments. If a community such as Kiwirrkurra, with a flourishing and self-determined economy, is destined for closure as sanctioned by the WA Government, what rationale is Barnett using to justify this? Economic viability is clearly not applicable to Kiwirrkurra. The final results section addresses the ground level action contesting this proposal.

### 5.3.3. The proposal, including rallies and protests

#### *Defining characteristics*

These articles talk specifically about the proposal and associated protests and rallies throughout Australia and New Zealand. These articles include information-sharing about the components of the proposal and the responses from Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous supporters and other Australians. These articles also detail rallies, including public meeting points and dates.

#### *Findings*

Five articles were framed by *rallies and protests*, three of which informed readers of upcoming rallies, reported on the number of attendees at rallies and shared responses from the public. These articles firstly promoted attendance at rallies and followed up with photographic evidence of the sheer number of attendees at protests that had already taken place. Figure 9 shows one photo published by McQuire to support her article, *Resistance to Closure of Remote Aboriginal Communities Continues with Protests around the Country* (photo credit: Amy Thomas; McQuire, 2015a). The comment below the photo states that in response to this protest, mainstream media “labelled the protestors a “selfish rabble” and provided no context or coverage of the reasons why they were protesting” (McQuire, 2015a: para 7), a clear example of biased news reporting. McQuire’s article goes on to highlight the response to the rallies evident in social media which showed strong support for the protesters including adoption and promotion of a twitter hashtag #SOSBlakAustralia.

McQuire also published an article about a long established protest of a different nature (2015c). *'Refugee Camp' For Aboriginal People Moved Off Remote Communities Ordered To Close* published in New Matilda, (2015c) discussed the development of a refugee camp on the island Matagarup (west of Perth). The refugee camp was borne out of native title threats in 2012 and was forcibly disbanded by police in the same year. In light of community closure threats, the refugee camp has been re-established and is welcoming those from all affected communities in WA (McQuire, 2015c). This is a display of solidarity amongst communities that are not naturally aligned, but rather have been brought together by homogenising political action.



Figure 9: Melbourne Protest. Image: Amy Thomas. (McQuire, 2015a)



#### 5.3.4. Conclusion to section

Although all articles were congruous in their contestation of the proposal to remove municipal services from Aboriginal communities in WA, they did this through varying means. Through analysis I was able to separate the articles into three themes. *Government representations and discourses* challenged statements made by key Government officials, taking a micro-level approach to deconstructing the language within those statements. *Indigenous development, knowledge and history* was the most prevalent of the themes identified. This theme took a more macro-level approach to contestation of the proposal, drawing from historical and contemporary events that contribute to the marginalisation of Indigenous Australians. Some authors approached this by targeting their writing towards those uninformed about Indigenous cultures whilst others emphasised the power imbalance resultant from colonisation and challenged practitioners to rethink how Indigenous development is viewed. And finally, the theme of *the proposal, including rallies and protests* not only provided information about upcoming rallies around Australia but also drew attention to impact of those rallies. Within this theme there was a space for challenging responses and reactions to the nationwide rallies, but also gave evidence of a growing solidarity not only between

Indigenous groups subject to marginalisation, but also from non-Indigenous individuals and organisations. Through protests against the Aboriginal-targeted proposal there is evidence of an increased awareness of the true Indigenous issues impacting development and this is contributing to a breakdown of the binary of indigenous and non-indigenous in Australia. I will now present findings with reference to the participant analysis.

## **5.4. DISCOURSE in ALTERNATIVE MEDIA: participation and sources**

Participants and sources were identified as primary, secondary or subsuming. Primary sources of information, defined as the use of direct quotes and contribution to the article (Martin, 2003), were the most common information source, followed by secondary sources. Subsuming voices were only identified in three of the twenty-four articles.

### **5.4.1. Primary sources**

Predominantly, articles analysed relied upon interviewees to inform articles, with fourteen articles analysed citing at least one primary source of information. One example is an article by Solonec. Similar to Altman, Solonec uses participatory research and interviews to inform her article *The trauma of Oombulgurri's demolition will be repeated across Western Australia* (Solonec, 2014). The purpose of Solonec's article was to illustrate the damage done by demolishing Oombulgurri and evicting residents. She does this by distributing information she directly obtained from those residents affected by the closure:

Residents described [Oombulgurri] as great place, where you could 'catch two barras on one line'. They told me the community contains several Aboriginal sacred sites, including ceremonial sites and a cemetery. (Solonec, 2014: para 6)

*Government blasted for closure plan* (Maxwell, 2014) also involved community engagement. Opposition Aboriginal Affairs spokesman Ben Wyatt and Aboriginal Labor MP Josie Farrer were interviewed about their travel to remote communities currently

under economic scrutiny: “There are serious concerns from both the communities and the local shires about where people will go if the communities are shut down” (Wyatt, cited in Maxwell, 2014: para 5). Maxwell also interviews KLC chairperson Anthony Watson.

The KLC, founded in 1978, is an Indigenous organisation representing approximately 20,000 Indigenous Australians across 423,000 square kilometres. The KLC’s vision is “a community organisation working for and with Kimberley Aboriginal people to get back country, look after country and get control of the future” (KLC, 2014). Of the seven articles using primary sources, four of these interview KLC chairperson Anthony Watson. Watson contests the proposal and calls for a participatory approach to community development rather than the racist and discriminatory shut down:

Colin Barnett has turned his back on Aboriginal people. His solution is to give up and do nothing at all. To say there is no answer is not good enough. There is always an answer.  
(Watson, cited in Koori Mail, 2014: para 9)

McQuire published two articles in *New Matilda* which strongly represented primary sources of information. In *Cuts to Community Services behind Rise in Alice Springs Crime*, McQuire interviews Alice Springs Councillor Chansey Paech (McQuire 2015e). Through engagement with the Councillor, McQuire is able to highlight and bring attention to the impact of budget constraints and under-utilisation of services on youth welfare in Central Australia. McQuire also interviews Principle Legal Officer for the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS) Mark O’Reilly, who raises concerns about the Government’s threat to remove anti-social youth from their families and the disproportionate reaction from police to the para-military groups threatening Indigenous youth in Alice Springs (McQuire, 2015e). In *‘Refugee Camp’ for Aboriginal People* McQuire interviews Nyoongar activist Marianne McKay: “this is how we feel as Aboriginal people. We feel like refugees in our own country” (McKay, cited in McQuire, 2015c: para 10).

In Padraic Gibson’s article, *The Māori are Coming*, Gibson interviews Māori activist Teanau Tuiono about the solidarity protests occurring in New Zealand (Gibson, 2015b). McCulloch interviews arts centre managers Paul Sweeney and Amanda Dent about the categorisation of the homes of world-renowned artists as unviable (McCulloch,



2015). Altman's research for *The Hunt for the Good Life* involved participatory research in Maningrida and was conducted in the vernacular through the use of interpreters (Altman, 2015b). Altman was able to draw from his relationships with community members built up over decades of participatory work and research and from this share some valuable Indigenous voices directly from the source.

### 5.4.2. Secondary sources

Seven articles relied on secondary sources of information. The use of secondary sources in these articles provided a platform for contestation of discourses. One such article, *Buckpassing leaves hundreds in limbo* presents secondary sources of information as a platform in which the author critiques and rebuts statements made by Premier Barnett (LRNC, 2015). The theme of this article was government discourses, therefore citing secondary sources was integral to forming the contestation. Altman follows suit, quoting both Abbott and Barnett before drawing upon his academic expertise to produce a comprehensive rebuttal to the inflammatory statements such as the infamous lifestyles comment by Abbott (Altman, 2015a). Secondary sources were also used to highlight one response to a mass rally in Melbourne.

In Bonson's article, *Indigenous activists and Dr Kerry Phelps clash on Twitter over rally* (2015) he uses twitter statements to follow a dispute between Dr Phelps, "a well-known non-indigenous Australian and respected figure in the LGBTQI<sup>[32]</sup> community" (Bonson, 2015: para 4) and rally attendees. Bonson uses secondary sources to shape his article, beginning with the catalytic statement by Phelps: "You may not agree with closure of remote communities, but it is not OK to paralyse a major city" (Phelps cited in Bonson, 2015: para 6). He then uses responses from other Twitter users to support his contestation and outrage at her statements, culminating with this poignant statement that brings community closures back to the forefront of the article:

Dr Phelps, if you interpret everyday Australians causing a traffic delay as "paralysis", I'd love to know what word you use to describe the reality of fearing your community, your home, is on the hit list for closure. (Bonson, 2015: para 11)

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<sup>32</sup> Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning and Intersex

Similar to Altman, Georgastos draws his field of academia to inform his article and the minimal sources to support his writing are secondary sources. For example, Georgastos states in his article introduction: “Arrernte Amajere Elder, Rosalie Kunoth-Monks most eloquently stated what should have been heard long ago by the Australian nation – “*I am not the problem.*”” (Georgastos, 2015: para 2). Georgastos uses this secondary source to shape the introduction to his editorial piece about the need for a shift in the lens from which Indigenous development is viewed.

### 5.4.3. Subsuming voices

Three articles subsumed the voices of Aboriginal Australians residing in WA. Father Chris Riley, Founder and CEO of Youth off the Streets, wrote a letter to the editor (Koori Mail) titled *Community Closure Shock* and talks about Aboriginal people having a strong connection to land. Father Riley calls upon the Abbott Government to reverse funding cuts “to ensure that Aboriginal people receive the support they desperately need” (Riley, 2015:10). Father Riley situates this request within a deficit frame, citing poor progress in reducing disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as rationale for support: “...the recently released Close The Gap 2015 report showed little progress toward equality and a fundamental lack of understanding of Aboriginal people” (Riley, 2015:3). Riley’s letter to the editor subsumes the voices of those directly impacted by the closures proposal and does little to promote agency and empowerment of community members, choosing instead to highlight deficits and the need for “support” from Government if any improvements are to be seen. Two other articles use subsuming discourses but are much more active in promotion of empowerment and agency.

Two articles subsumed Indigenous voices whilst making their positionality transparent. Marawili “speak[s] for my own and other homeland communities to remind people that we are the knowledge holders and caretakers of this country” (2015: para 2). Nyungah Land and Culture Protector Iva Hayward-Jackson writes an editorial letter about the impacts of colonisation in light of the current proposal. “The fact is that Australia has the highest incarceration rate and the highest suicide rate of indigenous peoples on the planet” (Hayward-Jackson, 2014: para 11). He speaks of the power imbalances and failure of Western-led development in the face of rising incarceration and suicide rates.

This is the reality of Aboriginal people in WA – no hope, no future and the reality is that Aboriginal people are never listened to and our thoughts are never acted upon. Not even the so-called free and open media will help us anymore. (Hayward-Jackson, 2014: para 13)

While Hayward-Jackson subsumes Indigenous voices, he is positioned as a respected Indigenous leader and protector of Nyungah<sup>33</sup> culture. He concludes with this compelling statement: “It was once said by the old people: ‘Jangga Meenya Bomunggur’ – the smell of the white man is killing us. Perhaps they mean Premier Barnett and Prime Minister Abbott” (Hayward-Jackson, 2014: para 22). Both of these articles speak on behalf of a vast range of communities, but highlight the need for recognition of repercussions of colonialism and paternalistic policies that have been applied to the caretakers of the country.

#### **5.4.4. Conclusion to section**

By using Martin’s description of participant sources (2003) I was able to identify who the key informants or sources of information for each article were. Predominantly, articles analysed represented primary sources of information. This provides evidence that these articles are informed and engaged with those involved in the news story, be it with an Indigenous leader, a politician or a community member. Secondary sources were used to shape and outline the proposal and included statements by Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott and WA Premier Colin Barnett. These statements not only formed the platform for the articles but gave context and space for rebuttal through fact checking and historical recounts of similar Government action.

Martin states that the subsuming of voices can disempower or silence the voice that is being spoken on behalf of (Martin, 2003: 202). Father Riley’s letter to the editor was positioned within a frame of deficit and disempowerment, whilst the remaining two articles starkly differed. The later reflected a frame of self-determination which began by highlighting the lack of progress within the colonial-political structure that sees Indigenous development as a problem to be fixed. These articles strongly promoted a

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<sup>33</sup> Indigenous groups located in the south-west of Western Australian; alternative names include Nyungar, Nyoongar, Nyoongah, Nyungah and Noonga (South Australian Museum Archives, 2015)

message of empowerment and agency from communities being targeted, despite using subsuming devices to disseminate their messages.

## 5.5. CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this analysis was to identify the role that alternative media plays in contributing to agency and empowerment for Indigenous Australians. By shaping my research around the PIC Report and the subsequent proposal to shut down remote Aboriginal communities in WA, I was able to firstly review the discourses of Premier Barnett and Former Prime Minister Abbott. This stage established the presence of a confusing and inconsistent trail of rationale for the community closures, which was also questioned within many of the alternative media news articles analysed. Three themes were identified through analysis of 24 articles, the theme of *Indigenous knowledge, history and culture* proving to be most prevalent. Discussion of my research findings will continue in Chapter six.

## **Chapter 6. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS**

This final chapter draws together findings and key points from Chapters 2, 3 and 5 to achieve the research aim and answer the research questions set out in Chapter 1. Firstly, the research approach and methodology will be summarised. This will be followed by discussion of each research question individually and finally the discussion points will be brought together to address the aim of the research.

The aim of this research was to explore the extent to which alternative media sources challenge normative representations of Indigenous peoples and provide an opportunity for alternate representations, specifically expressions of agency and empowerment. Two research question were posed:

1. How is Indigenous development represented by media in Australia?
2. How might the representations of Indigenous Australians put forward by alternative media contribute to development aspirations of agency and empowerment?

The conceptual framework for this research drew from hopeful post-development thinking (McGregor, 2009) and critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer, 2009) with a specific focus on Indigenous empowerment and knowledge (Maiava and King, 2007; Wunan Foundation, 2015). Literature was critically unpacked to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between Indigenous development and the media, formulating Chapters 2 and 3. The main method was CDA of news articles, retrieved from a range of alternative media sources. I will now independently address each of the research questions stated in Chapter 1, followed by a reflection on limitations and future research possibilities.

## 6.1. RESEARCH QUESTION 1: a discussion

*How is Indigenous development represented by media in Australia?*

Critical analysis of development discourses is imperative to understanding and challenging inherent and assumed power dynamics and the negative influences that some problematising discourses can have on development outcomes (Faiella, 2011). Deficit discourses which problematise Indigenous development can be seen in mainstream media coverage of Indigenous events and issues and there is evidence that in the face of frequent deficit narratives Indigenous livelihoods are not improving. United Nations analysis of global development shows that Indigenous Australian life expectancy is similar to that of a country with an HDI ranking of 157<sup>th</sup> in the world, despite being citizens of the second most developed country in the world (Australia is ranked second on the HDI) (UNPFII, 2015: 042). Deficit discourses can have an impact on individual and collective identity (Moncrieffe, 2007) as well as influence subsequent Indigenous policy development (McCallum et al., 2012) as seen with implementation of the Intervention (2007). Not only are deficit discourses failing to improve Indigenous livelihoods (Fforde et al, 2013), they continue to reflect colonial hegemony and contribute to the divide between the powerful and disempowered. By using deficit discourses, media can frame Indigenous Australian development into a *problem* to be solved.

Problematising discourses *other* the target group, homogenising them as powerless rather than empowered. There is also a sense of individual blame through these representations. For example, impoverished community residents are blamed for their “situation”. The case study regarding community closures shows an example of individual blame whilst simultaneously homogenising entire communities. For example, if poverty in communities is the key issue, the solution proposed by Barnett’s government is to pack all community residents into vans and move them somewhere where they might be able to find a job. The *problem* is framed as a collective issue afflicting all Aboriginal communities in WA, whilst the solution fragments the community cohesion and provides individual “solutions” to the collective problem. This narrative is heavily contested in alternative media, which commonly represents challenges within Indigenous development from a colonial context.

Through my analysis of alternative media news stories, it became clear that contestation of social injustices was commonly framed by recounts of previous social injustices (for example Altman, 2015a; Georgastos, 2015; Solonec, 2014) or informative descriptions of cultures and relationships with the environment (for example Altman, 2015b; Marawili, 2015). Research by Reconciliation Australia (2012) found that over a third of non-Indigenous respondents relied upon media as their sole informant on Indigenous cultures, history and current events. In light of this it is evident that alternative media is providing a space for education of non-Indigenous consumers through the use of narratives that actively contest problematising and stereotypical discursive representations. This education is done through two frames: historical recounts of ongoing social injustices and assimilation policies stemming from colonisation and the declaration of *Terra Nullius*; and strength based narratives of empowered communities such as those who have successfully established arts economies (see McCulloch, 2015). This finding adds to research by Budarick (2011) and Meadows (2012) that alternative media can promote the breakdown of prejudices and stereotypes so heavily evident in mainstream media.

Alternative media is active in not only contesting social injustices, but also in protecting, promoting and preserving Indigenous knowledges (for example James, 2014). Alternative media is also a platform for activism and this is evidenced by the dissemination of details about rallies and protests regarding the community closure proposal (for example McQuire, 2015a). Alternative media provides a voice for those disempowered by mainstream hegemonic narratives and in doing so gives rise to empowering agents of change. Whilst Atton defines alternative media in part as media that is not politically aligned (2002), analysis of alternative media articles for this research report revealed a strong opposition to the Barnett and Abbott governments. There is a fundamental assumption underpinning all articles that the community closures are not acceptable nor will they benefit Aboriginal development aspirations. If alternative media is to contest ongoing authoritarian state intervention, it is near impossible to do this without exhibiting some political alignment. When contesting the proposals and actions of a government it is not possible to fully disengage from some notion of political alignment. McCallum encapsulates the strengths of this complex relationship for both mainstream and alternative media:

...both mainstream and alternative news and social media outlets have played an important part in holding governments to account for the way they develop and implement policies to deal with social issues such as Indigenous disadvantage (McCallum, 2012b: 3)

Whilst McCallum highlights the role media has played in holding governments accountable in their management of Indigenous development policies, there is still a need for removal of deficits and problematisation from the discursive portrayal of a diverse population. In the current media landscape, alternative media is at risk of becoming consumed with contestation of these imposed labels and categories. The dominance of deficit narratives in mainstream media may have the adverse effect of limiting the scope of alternative media in sharing a voice of agency and empowerment to somewhat of a rebuttal. The following section will present my discussion regarding agency and empowerment in alternative media in more detail.

## **6.2. RESEARCH QUESTION 2: a discussion**

*How might the representations of Indigenous Australians put forward by alternative media contribute to development aspirations of agency and empowerment?*

The Wunan Foundation defines empowerment as “taking all appropriate and necessary powers and responsibilities for our own lives and futures” (Wunan Foundation, 2015: iii). Empowerment can be seen as a process enacted through agentic contestation of assimilation and problematisation and is related to human agency. Agency is the degree to which a person is able to be involved in a course of action and can be seen as limited by sociocultural factors such as media representations of development that homogenise and problematise Indigenous Australians (Ahearn, 2001; Drydyk, 2013). It has been established that problematisation through media can disempower and silence the target group, preferring to give a voice to the colonial hegemony. However, it is also established that alternative media provides a space for voices of agentic contestation and empowerment. A number of articles analysed demonstrated agency and



empowerment through coverage of mass rallies in city centres. This also provides evidence of a growing solidarity for Indigenous rights across Australia.

A criticism of mainstream media is that it fails to see diversity amongst Indigenous groups, preferring instead to homogenise them under one banner. Interestingly, alternative media also presented a collective identity when contesting the community closures. Rather than disempowering the communities through this narrative, alternative media demonstrated solidarity in protest of the proposal. What appeared more paramount was to establish the social injustice and then call for consultation from the Government to establish community-level strategies and goals for development.

Overwhelmingly, the articles analysed for this research report called for an urgent need for partnership and consultation with communities in limbo. Returning to the Wunan Foundation's ECEP Report (2015) they go on to explain that empowerment "also means Commonwealth, state and territory governments sharing and in some cases relinquishing, certain powers and responsibilities and supporting Indigenous people with resources and capability building" (Wunan Foundation, 2015: iii). In other words, there must be both grassroots ownership and recognition of development aspirations and partnership with Government in building capacity for change within those grassroots groups. This has been strongly reflected in the articles analysed, in which there is a recurrent theme of a need for consultation and participation. Opposition Aboriginal Affairs spokesman Ben Wyatt (cited in Maxwell, 2014) concisely summarises the basis of the urgent calls for consultation:

Not only did the Barnett Government fail to consult with Aboriginal people living in remote communities, it also failed to consult with the State's peak advisory group<sup>[34]</sup> ... Colin Barnett appears to be the only person that does not accept that, for the design and development of government policy, an actual contribution from Aboriginal people is required. (Opposition Aboriginal Affairs spokesman Ben Wyatt cited in Maxwell, 2014: para 9)

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<sup>34</sup> The West Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council

Going beyond a call for consultation to demonstrate empowerment, McCulloch heavily contested the categorisation of an internationally recognised arts hub as being economically unviable (2015). Interestingly, this article points out that the economic viability assessment took place in 2010 and that the community has seen huge developments since then (McCulloch, 2105). By highlighting this timeline, McCulloch contested the implication that a report developed more than five years ago still represents the development status of Aboriginal communities. Adoption of the 2010 PIC Report to determine community “viability” more than five years after its inception attests that the WA Government sees remote Aboriginal communities as static, disempowered and unable to elicit any progress or change without paternalistic interventions.

One converse to presenting an agentic or empowered identity could be to present a victim identity, in which the subject is restricted in progressing by those with whom the power is situated. This victim-identity was limited in the articles analysed for this research report. When the victim identity was presented, it itself was contested through examples of successful development endeavours or potential avenues for self-determining development. An example of adopting and reframing a victim narrative whilst demonstrating agency is in the article by Georgastos (2015).

Georgastos discusses the impact of colonisation for Indigenous Australians and the continuing oppression and marginalisation of the Indigenous population. He goes on to propose that the way forward is to cease examining the victim and instead examine the role of the oppressor. In this case, whilst Georgastos still used that frame of victim, he contests this by poignantly stating that the victim is not the one to blame for development disparities and therefore examination and change in those who dominate the relationship is needed (2015). His account of Indigenous development relies on situating livelihoods in a deficit framework as his academic lens is macro-political or systemic racism. The aim of his work is to bring to justice the colonisers who have contributed to the disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Georgastos addresses critics of his work:

I will never diminish the oppressed by writing predominately about them, for they are not the problem, they are not at fault and they are not the cesspool of wrongs that delivered the injustices, the damage and the trauma. (Georgastos, 2015: para 4)

Georgastos provides an interesting example of how victim identities and deficit discourses can be used as a platform from which contestation of ongoing marginalisation can be delivered. By adopting a hegemonic discourse of Indigenous identity, Georgastos redefines that identity and uses it to shift focus or “blame”.

Alternative media provides a space for delivering narratives of agency and empowerment, but does so from a collective Indigenous identity. It has been established that deficit discourses can have an impact on both the individual and collective identity (Moncrieffe, 2007) and it is interesting to see the resilience of the collective identity through frames of historical injustices and mass protests around Australia. There is a strong discourse of social injustice, not limited to the current community closure proposal, but reaching back as far as the declaration of *Terra Nullius* in Australia. Beyond the narrative of social injustice, alternative media provides alternate solutions to paternalistic policies, calls for consultation and partnership and demonstrates solidarity with non-Indigenous supporters around Australia. There are also strong currents of solidarity in contestation of the proposal. Solidarity was evident not just amongst those directly affected by the proposal but by other indigenous peoples around the world and non-indigenous Australians.

### **6.3. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of this research report was to explore the extent to which alternative media challenged normative representations of Indigenous Australians. It was established that mainstream media commonly chooses problematising and stereotypical discourses to represent selective issues of Indigenous development, most commonly health and education. These representations are followed with paternalistic and non-participatory interventions. Alternative media represents issues of Indigenous development from a collective perspective, while voicing the need for community-based engagement. There are strong currents of empowerment throughout alternative media, which stem from narratives that establish resilience in spite of a history of assimilation, discrimination and othering. The case study of the community closures proposal in West Australia is an example of the mobilisation of alternative media in contesting through narratives of agency and empowerment.

## **6.4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Due to the desk-based methodology for this research, there was no engagement with either consumers or producers of alternative media. The sample size for articles analysed was limited to twenty-four and it was beyond the scope of this research report to conduct a comparison with mainstream media coverage of the selected case study.

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## APPENDIX A: PRIORITY INVESTMENT REPORT

### Town Based Communities

*“Town based communities generally have access to services and facilities in adjacent town. Future investment should facilitate the formal integration of the community into the Town Planning Scheme and have access to the same level of services as the town residents.”*

1. Bindi Bindi
2. Bondini
3. Budulah
4. Bungardi
5. Burawa
6. Burrinunga
7. Cheeditha
8. Cullacabardee
9. DarIngunaya
10. Djimung Nguda
11. Gnangara
12. Gooda Binya
13. Irrungadji
14. Junjuwa
15. Karmulinunga
16. Kurnangki
17. Madunka Ewurry
18. Mallingbar
19. Mardiwah Loop
20. Marmion Village
21. Mindi Rardi
22. Mirlma
23. Morrell Park (Four Mile)
24. Mungullah
25. Nambi Village
26. Nicholson Block
27. Nillir Irbanjin (One Mile)
28. Ninga Mia Village
29. Nullywah
30. Parnpajinya
31. Pipunya
32. Red Hill (Lundja)
33. Tkalka Boorda
34. Warrayu
35. Wongatha Wonganarra
36. Bilgungurr

#### Category A

*“Communities where the preconditions for sustainable development exist. Residents have access to key services/opportunities and the community can offer services to the surrounding related communities. New investment is very likely to further facilitate and support long term Closing the Gap outcomes in these and their related communities.”*

1. Beagle Bay
2. Bidyadanga
3. Billard
4. Blackstone (Papulankutja)
5. Djarindjin
6. Glen Hill (Mandangala)
7. Jigalong
8. Kalumburu
9. Kurrawang
10. Lombadina
11. Mowanjum
12. Mt Margaret
13. Ngurawanna
14. Wakathuni
15. Wangkatjungka
16. Warakurna
17. Warburton
18. Warmun (Turkey Creek)
19. Woolah (Doon Doon)
20. Yandeyarra (Mugarinya)
21. Yardgee
22. Youngaleena
23. Yungngora
24. Bardi (Ardyaloon)

#### Category B

*“Communities where many preconditions for growth exist and residents have access to most key services and limited opportunities. New investment in these communities would support communities in Category A in providing services to other communities in the cluster.”*

1. Bayulu
2. Bobieding
3. Cosmo Newberry
4. Cotton Creek (Parnngurr)
5. Ganinyi (Louisa Downs)
6. Goolgaradah
7. Guda Guda
8. Imintji
9. Innawonga
10. Jarlmadangah
11. Joy Springs (Eight Mile)
12. Koongie Park



13. Kundat Djaru (Ringer Soak)
14. Kupungarri (Mt Barnett)
15. La Djadarr Bay
16. Looma
17. Milba
18. Mindibungu (Billiluna)
19. Mulan (Lake Gregory)
20. Muludja
21. Ngalingkadji
22. Ngumpan
23. Pandanus Park
24. Pia Wadjari
25. Pullout Springs (Girriyoowa)
26. Punju Njamal
27. Punmu
28. Rocky Springs
29. Wararn
30. Wingellina
31. Wuggan (Wuggabun)
32. Yakanarra
33. Yiyili
34. Yulga Jinna
35. Balgo (Wirrimanu)

*Category C: "Communities where there are constraints to sustainable development and opportunities for future growth are limited. Investments will be limited to sustaining existing assets and services."*

1. Alligator Hole
2. Badjaling
3. Balginjirr
4. Barrel Well
5. Baulu Wah
6. Bawoorrooga
7. Bedunburra
8. Bell Springs
9. Bells Point
10. Bidijul
11. Billinue
12. Bindurrk
13. Biridu
14. Birndirri
15. Bow River
16. Brunbrunganjal (Kittys Well)
17. Budgarjook
18. Bulgin
19. Bunnengarra

20. Bunningbarr
21. Burrguk (Banana Wells)
22. Burringurrah
23. Dodnun
24. Embulgun
25. Emu Creek (Gulgagulganeng)
26. Five Mile
27. Fletcher Family
28. Fly Well
29. Four Mile
30. Frazier Downs
31. Galamanda
32. Galeru Gorge
33. Geboowama
34. Gillaroong
35. Gilly Sharpe
36. Gnylmarung
37. Goobinj
38. Goodarlargin
39. Goojarr Gonnyool
40. Goolarabooloo
41. Goolarrgon
42. Goombading
43. Goombaragin
44. Goonjarlan
45. Kadjina
46. Kalungkurriji
47. Kalyadan
48. Kandiwal
49. Karalundi
50. Karnparni (Three Mile)
51. Kartang Rija
52. Kayirriwarney
53. Kearney Range
54. Kiwirrkurra
55. Koorabye
56. Kumbrarumba
57. Kunawarritji
58. Kupartiya
59. Kurinyjarn
60. Kurlku
61. Kutkabubba
62. Lamboo Station (Loongie Park)
63. Linga
64. Loongabib
65. Loumard
66. Lumuku (Osmond Valley Station)
67. Buttah Windee (Gidgee Gully)

68. Carnot Springs
69. Chile Creek
70. Chinaman Garden
71. Cockatoo
72. Cockatoo Springs
73. Cone Bay (Larinyuwar)
74. Coonana
75. Crocodile Hole
76. Darlu Darlu
77. Dillon Springs
78. Dingo Springs
79. Goose Hill
80. Gudumul
81. Gulberang
82. Gullaweed
83. Gulumonon
84. Gumbarmun
85. Gurrbalgun
86. Hollow Springs
87. Honeymoon Beach
88. Iragul
89. Jabir Jabir
90. Jameson (Mantamaru)
91. Maddarr
92. Majaddin
93. Malaburra
94. Marribank
95. Marta Marta
96. Marunbabidi
97. McGowan Island
98. Mercedes Cove
99. Mia Maya
100. Middle Lagoon
101. Millargoona
102. Mimbi
103. Djaradjung
104. Djarworrada
105. Janterriji
106. Jarlmadanka
107. Mingalkala
108. Mingullatharndo
109. Djibbinj
110. Djilimbardi
111. Djugaragyn
112. Djugerari (Cherabun)
113. Djulburr
114. Jilariya
115. Jimbalakudunj

116. Jimbilum
117. Jinparinya
118. Julgnunn
119. Jundaru
120. Miniata
121. Molly Springs
122. Monbon
123. Moongardi
124. Morard
125. Mowla Bluff
126. Mud Springs
127. Mudjarl
128. Mudnumm
129. Mulga Queen
130. Mullibidee
131. Mundud
132. Munget
133. Munmural
134. Munthanmar
135. Murphy Creek
136. Neem
137. Ngadalargin
138. Ngallagunda
139. Ngamakoon
140. Ngarlan
141. Ngarlan Burr
142. Ngulwirriwirri
143. Ngurtuwarda
144. Nilargoon
145. Nillygan
146. Nimbing
147. Norman Creek
148. Nudugun
149. Nulla Nulla
150. Nunju Yallet
151. Nygah Nygah
152. Nyumwah
153. Oombulgurri
154. Pago
155. Pantijan
156. Parukupan
157. Patch Up
158. Patjarr
159. Raddajali
160. RB River Junction
161. Red Creek
162. Red Shells
163. Rollah

164. Strelley
165. Tappers Inlet
166. Tirralintji
167. Tjalka Wara
168. Tjirrkarli
169. Tjukurla
170. Tjuntjuntjara
171. Ullawarra
172. Walgun
173. Wamali
174. Wanamulnyndong
175. Wandanooka (Kardaloo)
176. Warralong
177. Weymul
178. White Rock
179. Whulich
180. Windida
181. Windjingayre
182. Woodstock Homestead
183. Wulununjur
184. Wungu
185. Wurrenranginy
186. Yandarinya
187. Yardoogarra
188. Yarri Yarri
189. Yatharla
190. Yawuru
191. Yirralallem
192. Yulumbu

Source: O'Connor, 2015.

## APPENDIX B: QUICK REFERENCE TO ARTICLES ANALYSED

REFERENCE LIST: ARTICLES ANALYSED	
1.	Buckpassing leaves hundreds in limbo. (2015, April). <i>Land rights news: Central edition</i> .
2.	Marawili, D. (2015, Apr). Please come walk with us. <i>Land Rights News: Northern Edition</i> .
3.	Communities at risk (2015, 11 Feb). <i>Koori Mail</i> .
4.	Homelands threat. (2014, 19 Nov). <i>Koori Mail</i> .
5.	Councils oppose closures (2015, 11 March). <i>Koori Mail</i> .
6.	Community closure shock (2015, 11 March). <i>Koori Mail</i> . (Letter to editor)
7.	Premier replies on WA communities (2015, 11 March). <i>Koori Mail</i> .
8.	Maxwell, R. (2014, 3 Dec). Government blasted for closure plan. <i>Koori Mail</i> .
9.	Solonec, T. (2014, 3 Oct). The trauma of Oombulgurri's demolition will be repeated across Western Australia. <i>National Indigenous Times</i> .
10	Iva Hayward-Jackson. (2014, 3 Dec). (Nyungah Land and Culture Protector Western Australia) Smell of the white man is killing us... <i>The Koori Mail</i> .
11	Summit vows to fight on. (2014, 3 Dec).
12	Altman, J. (2015a, 11 Mar). Homelands under the hammer, again, from the aspiring PM for indigenous policy. <i>Crikey</i> .
13	Altman, J. (2015b, 4 May). The Hunt For The Good Life: A Black Perspective. <i>New Matilda</i> .
14	Bonson, D. (2015, 13 Apr). Indigenous activists and Dr Kerryn Phelps clash on Twitter over rally. <i>Crikey</i> .
15	Georgatos, G. (2015, 15 July). Stop examining the oppressed, instead examine the oppressor-this will do in racism and marginalisation. <i>The Stringer</i> .
16	Gibson, P. (2015a, 20 June). Assimilation and the push to close communities. <i>The Stringer</i> .
17	Gibson, P. (2015b, 30 Apr). The Maori Are Coming: Solidarity From Across The Ditch Against Forced Remote Community Closures. <i>New Matilda</i> .
18	McCulloch, S. (2015, 27 Mar). Indigenous arts centres respond to closure threat. <i>Crikey</i> .

19	McQuire, A. (2015, 1 May). Resistance To Closure Of Remote Aboriginal Communities Continues With Protests Around The Country. <i>New Matilda</i> .
20	McQuire, A. (2015, 10 Mar). Barnett Plays 'Abuse Card' To Defend Closure Of Remote West Australian Communities. <i>New Matilda</i> .
21	McQuire, A. (2015, 13 Mar). 'Refugee Camp' For Aboriginal People Moved Off Remote Communities Ordered To Close. <i>New Matilda</i> .
22	McQuire, A. (2015, 21 Apr). Maori Leader Brands Tony Abbott A 'Racist Bastard' Over Remote Closure Plans. <i>New Matilda</i> .
23	McQuire, A. (2015, 6 May). Cuts To Community Services Behind Rise In Alice Springs Crime. <i>New Matilda</i> .
24	Mitchell, T. (2015, 11 Apr). 'We'll Be Back': Thousands Protest Forced Closure Of Remote Communities. <i>New Matilda</i> .

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